



## Seeds aren't my thing

I have decided that growing plants from seed isn't my thing. I am not a seed woman. In my last saga I mentioned growing yellow annuals for the Golden Jubilee so, putting my money where my mouth is, I planted my Rudbeckia Cherokee Sunset in my heated propagator as instructed. I followed the instructions to the letter and waited with bated breath. Every day I was busy opening and closing vents, checking moisture levels, light, heat etc. After two weeks things appeared through my special compost mix. I then became paranoid that they would get too leggy and I turned the heat off to halt the

growth. And it did. They became transfixed in time. After a week of not moving I switched the heat back on and they all fell over. From a £1.99 packet of seeds I have five miserable little green things and I am not quite sure what to do next. Titchmarsh says to pot on when they are big enough to handle but I am terrified of touching them in case the last five keel over, and I thought bringing up kids was tough. Watch this space.

I have noticed recently a lot of negative comments in gardening magazines, newspapers and on the radio about modern or fashion gardening. We can't

expect everyone to be really in to gardening and if they choose to take short cuts with decking, pots and a splash of paint I don't think they should be criticised. At least they are out there doing their bit and who knows, one day they might want to do cuttings and, if they are really crackers, grow things from seed!

Spring came very early to us all and I for one was incredibly grateful. All the rain through the winter made me feel quite depressed and it was only the alcohol that took me through. I have been going to Victoria for the RHS shows in the early months and these are such a great lift on a dreary winter's day. Last year I picked up a tiny Epimedium Roseum and yes, it's busy flowering again this year, tiny pink flowers somewhat similar to Aquilegia. I am slowly expanding my snowdrop collection and I always buy 'in the green' from an exhibitor at Victoria. I was also very lucky to be given named varieties from a neighbour who has an amazing collection. Gardeners really are such nice people (including me!).

I grew wallflowers in the autumn for the first time in 20

years and I am so glad I did. I had forgotten just how good the perfume is. They look a bit lousy in January and February but certainly make up for it in April and May. My grandfather always used to grow them and it's rather nice to grow things that not only look and smell good but which have such wonderful memories attached to them. My mother-in-law's favourite was *Atropa belladonna*.

As I travel around looking at various gardens and parks I sometimes spot a little gem. In the last couple of years a beautiful Acer has been popping up. The bark and branches are cherry red and the leaves, when they appear, are lime green with a red vein. Its name is Acer 'Sango kaku' and if you see it in a garden centre or nursery grab it, you won't be disappointed. I planted lots of tulips in containers for this spring and I am a little concerned that they seem to be in flower three weeks earlier than expected. That means on 25 May, when my garden is open, there will be nothing but stalks in pots.

May is a good time for laying a new lawn either by



seed or turf and I throw Growmore over everything and the showery weather washes it in. You should be cutting the lawn weekly by now. Actually, I started cutting mine in March and I can't remember doing that before. Summer containers can be planted up in June, it's quite safe now the danger of frost has passed and tie in the shoots of climbing plants. That's a little message to all of you who came to Marcel Floyd's talk and plant sale of clematis. Don't forget to

water trees and shrubs that you planted in the winter if the weather turns a bit on the dry side. In July you can prune spring flowering shrubs such as Forsythia and Ribes and lightly trim Cytisus and Genista to keep them in shape otherwise they will become leggy and woody like mine. After you have done all the chores don't forget to sit down with a nice cuppa or a pint of crème de menthe and enjoy all your hard work.

Good gardening.

DIANE BERGER

## Plant Buys and Open Gardens

There is quite a lot going on in the coming months. 18 May is the Annual Plant Sale at the Fellowship; the Four Open Garden Tour, part of the Hampstead & Highgate Festival, starts at the Garden Suburb Gallery in Hampstead Way at 10.30 am on 25 May. There are still seats available for Pashley Manor Merriments gardens on Saturday 8 June and I am really pleased to announce an Open Garden Sunday on the Suburb

on 14 July. Gardens open are as follows:

20, 30, 86, 89 & 91 Willifield Way  
48 & 157 Hampstead Way  
7 Constable Close  
48 Erskine Hill  
3 Turner Drive

They will be open from 2-5 pm on Sunday and the entrance fee for each garden is £1.50. There will be refreshments in some gardens. I would like to thank everybody who has taken part because without you it would not happen.

DIANE BERGER

## Suburb rainfall

The first three months of 2002 have been much less wet in the Suburb than the similar period last year with 4.5 in. less. Indeed, what might be called the winter six months from October to March have been much drier, with 17.4 in. this winter compared with 30.4 in. last year. However, this is still above the average of just under 16 in. for the six month period. So we are still experiencing fairly heavy rainfall, especially when one recalls that the high rainfall of recent years has pulled the average up considerably. To give an indication of just how much drier winter months have been in the past, in the 1988/99 winter period just 10.4 in. were recorded in North London and in the 1991/92 winter less than 8 in.

January, with 2.6 in, had rather less than usual, while February, with 3.5 in, had 50% more than usual and March with 2.4 in. was a little over average. It had two good periods without appreciable moisture, 12 days from the end of February into March and 11 days at the end of the month. This continued to the date of writing on 5 April. So there has been an official drought – reckoned to be a period of 14 days without rain.

It is tempting to look for a pattern of wetter than average periods followed by drier than average but the opposite seems to have occurred rather more often. So there is no real prediction of a fairly dry early summer, but maybe gardeners will not want that anyway.

DIANA IWI

## 'Barnet in Bloom' competition

'Barnet in Bloom' is a free-to-enter gardening competition for Barnet residents. The competition is now in its twelfth year and its success continues to grow.

Its aim is to make Barnet a bright and colourful borough in which to live and work. Winners are automatically entered into the regional 'London in Bloom' competition.

Special rules apply to the Hampstead Garden Suburb category because many cottage gardens are near to a road. Gardens in this category may be entered if they are at the side or back of the property.

RULES (1) All entries must be within the London Borough of Barnet. (2) No correspondence will be entered into, and the judges' decision will be final. (3) Exhibits must be ready for judging by 22 June 2001. (4) Entries must consist of live plant material only - no artificial plants or spray paint must be used. (5) Any photographs organised by the council remain its property and may be used for any reasonable purpose. (6) Only displays that are visible to the passing public will be judged (with the exception to certain displays in the Hampstead Garden Suburb).

First prize is the Hampstead Garden Suburb *In Bloom* Cup and £25 gift vouchers from the Horticultural Society and 2nd prize is £15 worth of vouchers from the Horticultural Society.

Judges will be looking for bright, colourful gardens and floral displays which are original and interesting. Entry Forms are available from your local library or complete the form below.

All entries must arrive by Friday June 22 to Pauline Varnals, The Town Hall, The Burroughs, Hendon, London. NW4 4BG. Or you can fax to 8359 2666 or email to pauline.varnals@barnet.gov.uk

I wish to enter The Hampstead Garden Suburb Category in the 'Barnet in Bloom' competition.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

TEL: \_\_\_\_\_ FAX: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to abide by the rules.

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Hampstead & Highgate Festival 2002

Artistic Director Barry Millington

11-25 May

booking opens  
8 April

To join the mailing list please

telephone or fax  
020 8423 4121

or e-mail  
mailinglist@hamandhighfest.co.uk

or send your name and address on a postcard to

P.O. Box 33139, London, NW3 2ZQ

or access the Festival website on

www.hampsteadandhighgatefestival.co.uk

concerts talks exhibitions open gardens  
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