

The camaraderie of allotmenters...



Gill Read picks her own raspberries

Hampstead Garden Suburb is now in the height of gardening fashion. The thoughtful legacy of dear Henrietta in providing the plentiful allotment sites sprinkled across the Suburb means that we can all join in the grow-your-own frenzy that has gripped the nation.

When Gill and David Read bought their cottage on Temple Fortune Hill in 1964, the offer of the allotment came with it. 'We had lived in a flat. We didn't know anything about gardening and didn't think we could possibly cope with an allotment as well as a garden'. But they did and over the years they have tamed it!

Today the garden, filled with a choice mix of herbaceous perennials and shrubs, wraps neatly round the house. "The

garden took its own course gradually. Once the footballs and badminton over the washing line were out of the way, I was able to get going. After all, if you've got a garden, you've got to deal with it and make it so that you can enjoy it," says Gill.

Her main problem is the NE facing aspect, so the position of the beds is determined by where the sun strikes at different times of the day. Benches are set to catch the sun and shade-loving plants abound: heucheras, hardy geraniums, hostas, hypericum and self-seeding calendulas. A collection of pretty acers in pots is grouped under the three-fruit apple tree. Just for fun, a sleepy gnome keeps them company. "You wouldn't believe how difficult it is trying to track down a gnome in North London," grins Gill. This could set a trend...

Pots of low-growing Clematis Cezanne and Parisienne are slotted into gaps as the summer progresses. Seed-heads and grasses provide winter food for the birds. Greenfinches come in droves to the three bird-feeders together with chaffinches, tits, robins and dunnocks. Wood pigeons and blackbirds Hoover up the spilt seed.

On the other side of the hedge lie the Orchard allotments and a gate leads to them from the garden. There are four rectangular beds crammed with produce, with a row of cultivated blackberries to one side. Gill speaks with great enthusiasm about the camaraderie of her fellow allotmenters. "People are so friendly. We all help each other and exchange tips and seedlings. It's a way of life for some people,"

she says. She has also learnt a lot from being a member of the Horticultural Society and exhibiting at their shows where everyone is very helpful if you're not sure what to do.

Gill has some help with cutting the grass and hedges and David helps with the practical things – bean-poles, netting, pruning the prickly blackberries – but not with the planting, growing and harvesting which is Gill's domain. He has his own choice collection of succulents and cacti, and pots of small orange and lemon trees. Gill preserves the baby oranges and they are a treat with duck.

Gill reckons that the five allotment beds keep them in fruit and vegetables for about half of the year. She grows new potatoes in large bins. Soft fruit is bought from Ken Muir, the specialist fruit grower (log on to www.kenmuir.co.uk) and is sheltered from the birds in a fruit cage made by the Reads with help from Harrod Horticultural. Gill grows autumn-fruiting red and yellow raspberries; red, black and white currants and gooseberries. Blueberries grow in pots. Outside, a netted strawberry bed produces pounds of delicious fruit. Love-in-a-mist self-seeds around the rhubarb. Herbs share the dry bed by the yew tree with the compost bin.

In this awful wet summer, the tomatoes have been poor

although everything else has grown very well. "Onions are stored in boxes in the shed and last through until February. Broad beans are followed by three kinds of climbing beans: French (July); delicious black French (August) and runner (September). Chard will take over when the beans finish, followed by the sprouting broccoli. Little Gem and Lollo Rosso lettuces have done well and if you crop just the centres of the Lollo Rosso they will re-grow so you get two for the price of one! Sorrel, mizuna, rocket and nasturtiums add variety to the salad bowl, and potted peppers and chillis await some sun to ripen them. Sweet-corn and courgettes and self-seeded sunflowers flourish. The summer and autumn cropping season, when one enjoys the fruits of one's labour, are a very satisfying time."

With all this bounty, it is not surprising that Gill is a frequent prize-winner at the Horticultural Society's shows with her chutneys, jams and jellies. Here is her recipe for delicious dark, smooth, sweet and spicy pear chutney that 'goes with everything, especially cold meat and cheese'.

If you want to grow your own delicious fruit and vegetables and help save the planet, you can find out more about allotments from Pia Duran. Tel: 8458 2300 or email: allotments@hgs.org.uk.

ANNE CRAWLEY



Pots are slotted into gaps as the summer progresses



One of the five allotment beds



The gnome adds a touch of fun

SPICY PEAR CHUTNEY

Ingredients

3 lb pears, peeled, cored & sliced • 1lb onions, peeled & chopped
1lb green tomatoes, wiped & sliced • ½ lb stoned raisins, chopped
½ lb celery, finely chopped • 1½ lb Demerara sugar
¼ level tsp. cayenne pepper • ¼ level tsp. ground ginger
¼ oz salt • 5 peppercorns, in a muslin bag
2 pints of malt vinegar

Method

Put all the fruit and vegetable ingredients into a pan, with no added liquid, and simmer gently until tender. Add the remaining ingredients and simmer until a thick consistency, with no free liquid. Remove the bag of peppercorns, pot into scalded jars and cover.



To listen to weather forecasts, anyone would be forgiven for thinking we had had a summer of nothing but rain. Indeed, the excessive cloudiness experienced over so much of the period would seem to back this up. However, while there is no doubt that parts of the country have suffered floods and we may even have had outdoor events rained off, the summer has not seen the overall quantity of rainfall which will help to create folklore.

So far this year we have had 20 inches of rain, compared with an average of 18½ inches. So, no great excess there. If summer is taken to be June to August, the total of nearly 6¾ inches was slightly under the average of just

under 7 inches for the period. May, with over 3½ inches, was well above the mean and so, if it is included in the summer, the four months had an inch more rain than the norm. Three-quarters of the way through the month, pundits suggested August would experience its highest rainfall for a hundred years. This was later amended to four years, which is in fact what happened. At nearly 3 inches, rainfall was the highest since 2004, when there was a record total of over 5¼ inches. That really was a large amount. Thus, in spite of much excited reporting in the media, on the Suburb, at least, this year has been drier than last year so far. The last four months of the

year are usually wetter than the earlier part of the year, but they have, in the past, varied from 5¾ inches to 21½ inches. So there is little likelihood of speculating correctly.

Rainfall may have been less than it seemed it was going to be or had been, but it is not only actual amounts that affect our perception. In August, there were only thirteen days with no recordable rainfall. There have only been two Augusts with fewer rainless days since these records

began in 1980. The presence of brooding skies and lack of sun certainly gives an impression of a cold, wet, English summer. The lack of really hot days reinforced this. However, this was August, and May, June and July were more normal as far as days without rain were concerned. To count our blessings, at least, there was rain, no hose pipe ban, no long hours spent watering or wondering whether to. The garden has grown beautifully, weeds included.

DIANA IWI

Could a Buddy help?

When visiting open gardens or observing the excellence displayed at gardening shows, how many of us have wondered 'How do they do that?' or 'What do I need to do to achieve that effect in my garden?'. Perhaps we are new to gardening or have problems with a shady area, a frost pocket, or an ailing plant. On North London's clay it can be a challenge to achieve the 'free draining soil with a sunny aspect' advised for so many plants. Yet many Hampstead Garden Suburb gardens show evidence of the expertise of their gardeners. The Suburb now has eight Yellow Book (National Gardens Scheme) gardens open to the public for charity, with more in the pipeline for next year.

The brainchild of Membership Officer, Sonia Mathias and as part of the Hampstead Garden Suburb Horticultural Society's Centenary Year celebrations in 2009, a Gardening Buddy Scheme was launched at a gardening Question and Answer Session, 'How Does Your Garden

Grow?' on 25 September at Fellowship House. The Buddy (an experienced gardening member of the Horticultural Society) can arrange to visit your garden once or twice to discuss the problems and develop a plan of action. This might include friendly advice on how to prepare your flower or vegetable beds, choose suitable plants, do general maintenance, or establish your new garden, etc. They will NOT do your digging, mow your lawn or cut your hedge!

Our aim is to celebrate HGS Horticultural Society's centenary as a community of gardeners, able to learn from one another. The society is looking for experienced 'Buddies' who have confidence in their gardening knowledge and would like to pass it on, and for people with enquiries about their own garden. Many people might see themselves as falling into both categories!

If you can volunteer to be a gardening Buddy, or want to use the services of a Buddy for your garden, telephone 020 8455 7334 or email buddies@hortsoc.co.uk.

THE GARDEN CALENDAR Your Garden in Autumn

☞ Pick all apples and pears by the end of October and store in a cool dry place. Check frequently and remove any rotting fruit before it spreads. Remember to leave some on the ground for the birds.

☞ Pick all tomatoes before the first frosts. Green ones will ripen in a warm, dark place or are delicious made into chutney.

☞ Clear up the worst of the debris from borders and vegetable patches and add it to the compost heap. Burn perennial weeds like bindweed and nettles, but leave seed-heads for the birds' winter sustenance.

☞ Lift and split perennials every three years (swap the extra plants with friends). Mulch newly planted shrubs with compost and don't let them dry out.

☞ Take cuttings of frost-tender plants like pelargoniums, penstemons, and lemon verbena and over-winter under glass.

☞ Collect fallen leaves into bags. Tie up, make a few air-holes and leave in a shady spot outdoors. This time next year you will have beautiful leaf-mould to feed your plants for free.

Not nothing but rain?






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