

Suburb Yellow Book Gardens 2011

The National Gardens Scheme was born in 1926 when Elsie Wragg told the Queen's Nursing Institute, "We've got all these beautiful gardens in this country and hardly anyone except their owners and friends ever sees them - why don't we ask them to open next year for the Appeal?"

The Appeal was to raise money for a memorial to the late Queen Alexandra, a great patron of nurses. You can see it today opposite Friary Court in St James's Palace. The success of the garden openings was such that it was decided to make them an annual event, raising money for various nursing charities.

In the years before the Second World War, the numbers of garden openings grew and grew. Throughout the war years, opening was considered part of the war effort; a means of raising spirits and demonstrating how best to grow vegetables. Digging for Victory took its toll on ornamental gardening and all the able-bodied young gardeners had gone off to war. Vita Sackville-West herself scythed the orchard at Sissinghurst, helped clip hedges and trees and, in spite of the weeds that

mingled with her tapestry of flowers, the visitors (her beloved 'shillingses') were treated to a display of luxurious vegetables and fruit.

Since then, the Yellow Book has become a national institution, every year raising millions of pounds for various nursing charities and Perennial (the charity for gardeners who have fallen on hard times). Television coverage and an unprecedented number of books, magazines and newspaper articles have fuelled an increasing awareness of the importance of gardening to our national well-being.

Originally, the gardens were the preserve of the aristocratic and/or wealthy owners of luxurious country houses whose rolling acres were tended by teams of trained (and cheap) gardeners. Today, of course, things have changed; gardening has almost become a national sport and our ten Suburb gardens opening for the National Gardens Scheme in 2011 are very varied; we have exotic and Mediterranean-style gardens, traditional cottage gardens, an Elizabethan parterre and an ultra-modernist take on an Arts and Crafts cottage garden.

On 5 June, we have a group opening of four gardens; armed with map and compass (only joking!) you can spend a happy Sunday afternoon flitting from one gorgeous garden to another. Start with Michael Franklin at 94 Oakwood Road; his is a romantic cottage garden in a beautiful woodland setting. Here the herbaceous beds are planted with many unusual plants, and Michael has some for sale too.

Patricia Larsen at 5 Heathgate also has plants for sale as well as hand-made greetings cards depicting the flowers in her garden. Her front garden, ablaze with roses and annuals in June, leads past a foot maze to a lawned back garden with lovely, traditionally planted herbaceous borders. Some contemporary designer features lift this garden into the 21st century.

Marjorie and David Harris at 48 Erskine Hill welcome you to their pretty garden stuffed with perennials, roses and clematis. There's an intriguing brick-paved area with four raised beds, and a terrace adorned with numerous pots and containers. Marjorie promises plants for sale raised in her new greenhouse in this bird-friendly, organic garden.

To enter Karen Grant's garden at 91 Willifield Way is to step back in time to Tudor England. Pass the topiary framed windows and enter an enchanting secret garden where the scent of blush roses, pale honeysuckle and jasmine hangs on the still air. A white dovecote hovers over box-edged beds in filled with cottage garden favourites. All is private and dreamy, enclosed within high hedges and guarded by an ancient oak. Tea is served on the front lawn and there are plants for sale.

Ruth Rees' garden at 5 Hillcrest Avenue (off Bridge Lane) opens on 12 June in the afternoon and



on 15 June in the evening. Ruth has an urban jungle front garden with drought resistant plants lending an exotic, Mediterranean air. There's a small labour-saving back garden, steeply sloping to a rockery, fishpond and conservatory. Ruth is one of our longest-serving NGS gardeners and has raised thousands of pounds over the years by opening this garden, so do visit and help her continue the good work.

At 113 Corringham Road, Veronica Clein is a professional garden designer and business woman. Her garden has been featured in The Good Gardens Guide, The English Garden and Gardens Monthly. On Wednesday 23 June Veronica is doing an evening opening with wine and light refreshments. Profusely planted with perennials, shrubs and annuals in Persian carpet colours, her garden packs a punch; there's a wildlife pond, a potager, a greenhouse and contemporary sculpture. Lots of plants for sale too!

Two very different small gardens are opening on 26 June. Peter and Yvonne Oliver, at 4 Asmunds Hill, have an award-winning cottage garden with pond, patio, sculptures and objets trouves. Clematis and climbing plants are a speciality in this exquisitely manicured garden.

Ian Shelley, at 15 Creswick Walk, has a spanking new-made garden designed by Stephen Crisp. The back garden is a minimalist 'machine for living' with topiaried holly balls set in box-edged squares and a Wendy House for the grandchildren. In the main front garden, strong asymmetrical design underpins the relaxed cottage garden planting in an unique mix of traditional and modern styles. Home-made teas are served on the patio.

Moving on to 24 July, Diane Berger is opening her spectacular cottage garden with a contemporary twist at 86 Willifield Way. Here you will see colour-themed herbaceous borders designed for year-round interest, a wildlife pond, a gazebo and a rose and

clematis-clad pergola. This inspirational garden has won many awards. Teas are served on the lawn.

Also opening on 24 July is Tessa Levine's lovely garden at 51 Northway. This mature, secluded garden is crammed with a diverse and colourful selection of hydrangeas, clematis, roses, perennials, grasses and shrubs. At the back, a path meanders through a woodland area with shade-loving hostas, ferns and foxgloves.

Opening times, admission prices, wheelchair access and lists of gardens to visit across London can be found in 'London Gardens 2011', available free in libraries and garden centres.

ANNE CRAWLEY
NGS ASSISTANT COUNTY ORGANISER



Extreme weather

The summer wasn't hot. The late autumn soon became winter and was cold. In November there were two days when the temperature did not rise above freezing all day, not experienced before in these North London records, going back to 1956. In December, the number of days with maximum temperatures below freezing was nine, compared with four in December, 1962. In that winter, January had 13 similarly cold days and the season was one that all those who lived through it still tell tales about. At the time of writing it is still possible to hope that January, 2011, will not see a repeat of that.

However, this column is meant to be about rainfall. Recent precipitation has, of course, fallen as snow. Using the old, and rather simple, method of sticking a ruler in the snow to see how deep it is, and using a conversion factor of one foot of snow equals one inch of rain, fortunately

agreed with a possibly more scientific way of bringing in any snow on top of the rain gauge and melting it. In the end, both falls of snow together only amounted to the equivalent of less than half of inch of rain. Elsewhere in the country, heavier falls of snow would lead to more water lying and local flooding when it melted, but round here it just seemed to be messy.

Overall the total rainfall for the four months of September to December was well below average at 8.47 inches. As the previous nine months of the year had seen considerably above average amounts, the yearly total of 29.39 inches was just an inch below the norm. August and October between them had nine inches of rain so there is no reason to fear that we go into 2011 with a deficit in groundwater. Just at the moment we would, perhaps, prefer a little more sun.

DIANA IWI



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