

Down the allotment Poisoned by the hedge as a murder of crows flies by



A notice on the Allotments email forum a little while back caused quite some alarm. Ian Davidson wrote that he had just recovered from three days of dizziness, lethargy and being unable to focus properly and that he wanted others to be aware of the cause. To wit, he had cut some branches from a laurel hedge, chopped them up and dumped them in the green bin. In doing so, he had unwittingly released cyanide gas which is emitted by laurel leaves and branches. "The stupid thing is, I'd heard about the dangers of laurel but really thought it unlikely with such a small quantity. Butterfly collectors can soak laurel in water to make a liquid that kills butterflies," he said. I am reliably informed that laurel leaves contain a cyanide compound, which turns into hydrogen cyanide when crushed or chewed. It's a potent poison.

Just as are all parts of laburnum, especially the seed pods which look similar to immature pea pods. If ingested, death would be the likely outcome. All of which prompted me to reflect that among the esculent greenstuff on our allotments there are a number of toxic plants, or parts of plants, about which allotmenters ought to be aware.

Potatoes with skin turned green because they have broken through the earthed-up haulm and been exposed to sunlight, and rhubarb leaves come to mind. The former contain atropine (of deadly nightshade infamy) which can cause headaches, dizziness and stomach upsets. Atropine is also present in tomato leaves, green tomatoes and vines.

Of rhubarb, during both world wars the Ministry of Food, in urging the population to make the most of potential food sources, promoted the

cooking of rhubarb leaves. Not a good idea as rhubarb leaves are toxic, as are the stems to a far lesser extent and it goes without saying that they are safe to eat.

While mulling over these matters one of my companions sitting on the allotment bench remarked about a number of blackbirds which had alighted on the nearby plots while, up above, several crows were swirling and cawing. What were the collective nouns for these birds, she wondered. Between us we managed to come up with a murder of crows, but were stumped on blackbirds. Which led us to test each other on the collectives of the birds and animals with which we as Suburb residents are familiar. We did not get too far so with the help of references, here are some charming and curious names that we might see on the Suburb a kit of pigeons, a scold of jays, a tiding of magpies, a charm of finches, a tribe of bluetits, a descent of woodpeckers.

And the blackbirds we saw? I was unable to find a collective for the blackbird which is as congregational as some of the above, so I offer my own: a choir of blackbirds. Offered in appreciation of the cadences they exchange, as if talking to each other as they sing among the tree tops in the early evening. They create a melody of counterpoints. Like a choir.

PETER HODGSON

Which way to St Jude's, I'm late for choir practise



Summer Gardening

With the verdant flush of spring growth far behind us and exuberant late summer colour not too far ahead, the summer hiatus is about to hit most gardens. Late spring flowering plants have gone over, collapsed and mildewed, whilst high summer performers are just coming into bud. Everything looks tired and dry.

Don't lose heart. No need for the garden to lose its impetus. With some clever pruning and mid-season planting you can revive your garden in a week-end. Everyone is familiar with the Chelsea Chop, a 50% haircut performed on early summer blooming perennials during Chelsea Flower Show week to delay & stagger flowering times. But equally useful is the practice of clearing away the spent flower stems of perennials through July and early August to promote fresh new growth and a possible second, albeit more modest flush of flowers: Campanula, geum, centurea Montana and knautia all qualify for this treatment. Go one step further and cut all old growth of hardy geraniums,

astrantia, pulmonaria, lamium and especially the Suburb stalwarts, self-sown aquilegia and Welsh poppies, right down to ground level. Follow this with a liquid tomato feed (with a high concentrate of potassium to promote flower development) and jolly good watering.

So now you have quite a few bald patches. Don't panic. This will give you the opportunity to identify any gaps in your borders where you can inject some late summer flowering perennials or annuals for instant colour to carry your displays through into early autumn. Although not considered good gardening practice at this time of year it is sometimes viable to move perennials that are being crowded out by a neighbour or have proved to be a clashing partner. As long as we are not experiencing drought conditions or hot drying winds, choose a dull day preferably with rain forecast, to make your moves, then feed once and water every day until established. If a patch of bare ground is too root bound for planting why not create a feature by positioning a



decorative pot or garden statue in the gap. A statement plant such as canna or ginger lily can also create a focal point of interest.

Another tip for sharpening up a tired plot is to summer prune evergreen shrubs. Ivy will be quietly romping away so prompt action now will keep it in check: Cut back runners from the base of your borders and prune overhanging whippy stems from vertical surfaces to stop overshadowing and draining all the moisture from your soil. Reshape box balls and topiaries, trim creeping euonymus and vinca. Pittosporum will benefit from a light trim but don't go too deep into these or they can die on you! Plant growth can be uneven so don't be shy of shortening the odd rampant whippy stem of abelias, weigelas and berberis

here and there to even up their overall shape.

Containers could do with a midseason makeover by now too. Remove any stragglers from displays – trailing lobelia has a habit of dying off first – and shorten leggy annuals such as petunias by about half, and your displays will appear instantly refreshed.

Keep feeding every fortnight, keep watering and keep deadheading. And last but by no means least the simple task of neatening lawn edges, even if there is no time to mow, will bring instant order to your garden.

Making these timely adjustments now will rejuvenate your garden well into October. Fingers crossed for a wonderful Indian Summer!

CAROLINE BROOME

Summer at last!

It seems that we are actually having summer this year, and the Horticultural Society has benefited from this, with large crowds coming to watch Hon President Jonathan Ross open the Summer Flower Show and judge the children's and adults' fancy dress competitions at the Free Church Hall in June. There was a very enjoyable coach outing to Bayford Gardens in Hertfordshire, where many gardens of all sizes were open, bands played and a lovely time was had by all in the sunshine. By the time you read this, the second residential trip will have taken place, with visits to famous gardens in and around Herefordshire.

For those who wish to visit or re-visit Beth Chatto's fabulous garden in Essex, together with RHS Hyde Hall, on 21 August, there are still seats available for the coach. Tap your feet to brass band music at the Autumn Show on 6 September, when Grimsdyke Brass from Harrow will return to the garden of the Free Church

Hall by popular request and, of course, meet your friends for home-made teas and buy your spring bulbs at the show.

Our popular Gardeners' Question Time with Jim Buttress and Mark Wasilewski will take place on 13 September (watch out for a change of venue as Fellowship House will be closed). Suburb author Jennifer Potter will talk about her latest book – Seven Plants that Changed the World' on 16 October. Full details of times, dates, venues and how to join the Horticultural Society can be found at www.hortsoc.co.uk.

Finally, congratulations to Hort Soc Chairman Chris Page for coming first in the Suburb in Bloom Competition and to Diane Berger and Yvonne Oliver for winning second and third places. Both Yvonne (4 Asmuns Hill) and Diane (86 Willifield Way) opened their beautiful cottage gardens in aid of the National Gardens Scheme charities in July.

MARJORIE HARRIS



Suburb rainfall

After such a wet winter, the three months of April, May and June have been much drier. Indeed, at 5.5 inches, they have received only half the amount experienced in the first quarter of the year, 12.5 inches. Even before then, March had little more than half the norm. April's rain, at 1.14 inches was identical to that of March and June's, at 1.4 inches was little more. It was only the 3 inches in May that prevented too great a surface drought, and the groundwater from the winter that has enabled trees and shrubs to put on such a splendid show. We have probably forgotten about the possibility of a hosepipe ban.

Perhaps the only really disappointing thing about recent rainfall is the lack of thunderstorms. We have been promised some and really heavy rain but it doesn't seem to have materialised. Yes, we had some thunder and hail on May 24, but it was very half-hearted.

A really good, wholesome thunderstorm can be so exciting – provided, of course, that one is happily ensconced inside and not bothered about having to get out in the near future! There is still time for an enjoyable event later this month or in August, when they are most likely to occur.

DIANA IWI

Fire their imagination

Now on the Suburb, by popular demand, FunTech offers kids and teens the opportunity to dive into the world of computer technology. It provides the perfect blend of structured learning and immense enjoyment – from animation, building games, Java coding and everything in between.

The new centre is packed with cutting edge computers and touch screen technology.

Educated by some of the best and most passionate teachers in the UK, the lessons are based on the sound principles of dynamic

teaching styles and small classes – interaction is an important component of their ethos.

Term time courses include an array of technology skills ranging from the structure of the internet, coding websites and creating 2D games while summer camps take place during July and August, with an amazing choice of camps from the ultra-popular Minecraft Redstone to robot programming and much more.

For more information email enquiry@funtech.co.uk, ring 8455 5227 or visit www.funtech.co.uk.

Welcome to St Jude's

Sundays:
8am Said Eucharist
10.30am Sung Eucharist
(Junior Church meeting in the Vicarage Rooms)

Thursdays:
10am Said Eucharist
All welcome!

Open House weekend:
10am-5pm Saturday 20 September
12 noon-5pm Sunday 21 September

Harvest Festival:
Sunday 5 October



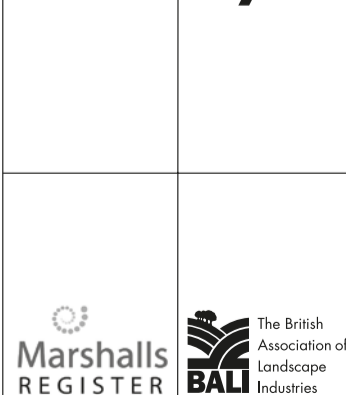
JOSHUA BERGER
CARPENTRY

For all your professional
carpentry needs

I specialise in all domestic and commercial carpentry to the highest possible standards. Professional decorating services also managed with over 10 years of excellence.

Call now for a free quotation
07811 911 389
joshuabergercarpentry.com

berrys



www.berrysgardens.com

Caring for the Suburb for 20 years

landscaping
design
patios
planting
drives

020 8209 0194

maintenance
turfing
watering systems
fencing
lighting