

Down the allotment

Happy hunting for those at the top of the food chain

Some 50 ploholders attended the annual seasonal supper held this year in the church hall in Northway. An ambience was created to reflect the arrival of autumn and the drawing to a close of the growing season. Dishes brought by the guests symbolised in many cases the pride allotmenters had in raising their own vegetables.

Competing for the principal prize, the Phyllis Young Trophy, were some 100 ploholders from 11 sites across the Suburb. The winner, as she has been on two previous occasions, was Pamela Hall, of the Willifield Way/Temple Fortune Hill site. She narrowly beat Ivor King and Grant Cathro, of Big Site, into second place, with Peter Hodgson, also of the Willifield site, in third.

Pamela, who has worked her plot for 43 years, once again showed her characteristic flair for growing, impressing the judges with the orderliness and general tidiness of her lines together with the variety and quality of her products, which included a 1lb 10oz cucumber measuring 16 inches long.

Patricia Major, who presented the prizes, introduced this year, her first as chairwoman of the Allotments Committee, a number of subsidiary award-winners.

They included Josie Armstrong who was highly commended for an outstanding allotment at Eastholm and Mike Cassell and Christos Kitsiou who took the Best Newcomer's award for turning round a particularly rough and challenging corner of the Chatham

Close site into perhaps one of the most productive plots per square foot in the Suburb.

The effort which went into providing raised growing beds at the Garden Suburb Junior school, and the subsequent enthusiasm shown by the pupils, was rewarded with a special commendation. Other winners were:

Tallest sunflower, Erin Hodgson (Big site); Fantastically Floral, Ivor King (Big site); Biggest pumpkin, Tim Manley (Orchard North); Unusual vegetable, Kate Morris for her khol rhabi (Orchard); Fennel, David Goyla (Big site); Tomatoes, Peter Hodgson (Willifield Way/TFH); Corn, Chris Page (Big site).

Some autumn jobs and tips: Dispose of diseased foliage, especially tomato plants that have been afflicted with blight. Do not add to compost heap or leave lying about as the blight virus is resilient and will lay dormant in the earth until conditions are right for its reappearance in late July next year. Sterilise soil with 100-1 dilution Jeyes Fluid as added precaution; Sow broad bean seeds for next year; Plant garlic, onions for harvesting in June; Plant rhubarb or split existing crowns for replanting in heavily-manured soil; Transplant spring cabbages but cover to protect from pigeons; Plant out new fruit bushes such as currants and gooseberries. (Pruning of existing bushes can be left until the New Year); Begin winter digging.

PETER HODGSON



Pamela Hall, this year's Allotment Trophy winner, and Peter Hodgson (site sec. Willifield Way & Temple Fortune Hill allotment)

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Welcome to St Jude's

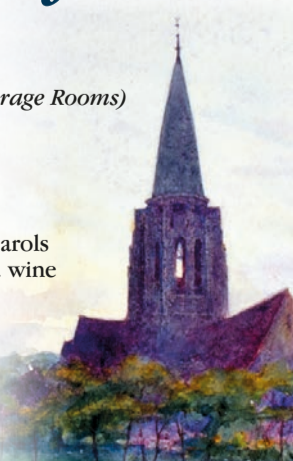
Sundays:
8am Said Eucharist
10.30am Sung Eucharist
(Junior Church meeting in the Vicarage Rooms)

Thursdays:
10am Said Eucharist
Christmas at St Jude's

Sunday 21 December
6pm Service of Nine Lessons and Carols followed by mince pies and mulled wine

Christmas Eve 24 December
4pm Children's Nativity Play
11.30pm MIDNIGHT MASS

Christmas Day 25 December
8am Mass of the Dawn
10.30am Christmas Celebration



Gardening in the autumn and winter



In the summer months, I for one am always reluctant to cut flowers from my garden for the vase, as I think they look better where they grow. But throughout the winter it's a different matter. How many of us even venture into our gardens other than a mad dash to the greenhouse to check on overwintering tender plants? And yet the forms and textures of bare stems and seed heads can create dramatic effects and long lasting displays, which can be enjoyed indoors as table displays and seasonal arrangements through-out the autumn and winter months.

From November onwards you can afford to be a lot more ruthless about cutting than you might be in the summer garden. Plenty of plants will need their annual trim now anyway, others won't miss a few stems here or there.

Unlike summer flowers which are primarily picked for colour and fragrance, winter displays focus on contrasting structure to make an impact. First consider the practicalities.

You will need plenty of room for assembly and be prepared to make a soggy mess! Select vases and bowls substantial enough to support saturated oasis and woody plant material, as these can be very heavy. You will need green oasis; this is a living display in the most part and therefore needs water. The oasis should be soaked in water for at least half an hour before hand, and once fully absorbed it can be cut to fit its container, carefully using a sharp non serrated knife. Push the oasis in firmly as you want a tight fit; it should fill at least three quarters of its container. Finally fill the container with water to an inch below the rim.

Now for the challenge. Look out for as many contrasting shapes, colours and leaf forms as you can find in your garden. And don't be cautious. To create a basic structure cut 3ft lengths of bare stemmed coloured dogwood (Cornus alba sibirica) has vivid red stems but there is orange Midwinter Fire, as well as black & green forms. For more



fluid movement use evergreen pittosporum tenuifolium Irene Patterson, variegated green and white leaves on black stems, and Tom Thumb for its maroon foliage tipped with lime green, 2ft strands of ivy, with black berries if you are lucky. Stalwart evergreen shrubs will bulk up your displays: Boldly variegated yellow and green spotted laurel, grey eucalyptus, silver backed leaves of eleanus, strappy metallic leaves of phormium and astelia as well as architectural leaves of Trachycarpus (Chusan Palm), fatsia, even hellebore. For seed heads you can't beat hydrangeas and coppery miscanthus malpartus grass, for colour you can't beat the bright orange papery pods of physalis (Chinese lanterns) and for berries cotoneaster, but do leave some for the birds! These are just a fraction of the variety of material you will find in your own back gardens.

So now it's time to play. Once inside, sort and untangle all the different varieties of plant material, remove dead

leaves, using sharp secateurs neatly trim stem ends. Pushing firmly into the oasis, insert your tallest pieces first to create a framework and gradually build up your arrangement by regularly viewing from left to right, as well front to back if this is to be a table centerpiece. I aim to create a traditional fan shape with some trailing ivy around the base, particularly effective in hiding the oasis if it's in a glass vase, but you can try your hand at asymmetrical or Japanese inspired displays. Bows, ribbons and candles (for display only) can add a touch of glamour for the festive season. It's vital to check water levels daily, especially in centrally heated environments, as the plants soak up moisture fast and the oasis should not be allowed to dry out.

Don't forget to check your display regularly for any shedding or dead material, replacing with fresh as required, and your display should last for up to three weeks.

CAROLINE BROOME

Autumn in the Suburb

Leaf fall is an inherent aspect of our leafy suburb and with increasing use of leaf blowers, householders are requested to provide clear guidelines to their gardeners. Ideally gardeners should provide stewardship of the natural environment and this should include efforts against air and noise pollution.

The World Health Organisation recommends noise levels of 55 decibels or less and a typical leaf blower runs at 75 decibels. Noise above 70 decibels is very annoying whilst above 85 decibels is dangerous.

Noise can be troubling and have a negative impact on those that do not consent to it. Also

note that leaf blower use on loose grit, gravel drives and dust covered surfaces raising dust and pollen into the atmosphere is considered irresponsible.

The council clears autumn leaf fall, but not until nearly all the leaves have fallen. There may be a period of a few weeks prior to clearance where the trees on council land have shed leaves and it would be helpful if residents would extend care of their surroundings by collecting and disposing of leaves in their vicinity. A little extra effort from each resident would go a long way towards maintaining a better environment for all.

PETER MCCLUSKIE



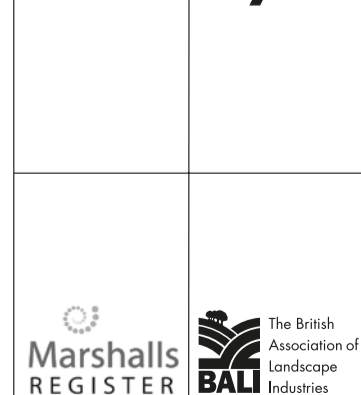
Wettest August? Not here it wasn't!

The media has got excited about rainfall levels in Britain this summer. We had the wettest August ever. Not in the Suburb. Sure, the 4.28 inches that fell in that month was virtually double the average, but 2004 and 2010 both received over an inch more. Similarly, reports of the driest September since records began in 1910 must have applied to places elsewhere in Britain. In the Suburb, with rainfall of just short of an inch, in six years since 1980 the total was smaller than in 2014. It seems a pity that accuracy must be sacrificed for the sake of a good story. Once again, it must be emphasised that there cannot be a single comment which can apply everywhere in Britain.

In fact, when one looks at our rainfall for the year so far (25.2 inches), it can be seen that it is well above the average of 21 inches and has only been exceeded in 2001, when the total was 28.26 inches. All the months have either had well above average or considerably below so that no hosepipe bans have been needed but neither have too many outdoor activities been a washout or gardens been flooded. Flowers seem to have enjoyed the weather and it seems elsewhere in the country there is a bumper apple harvest. Not, of course in the Suburb, where surely this garden is not the only one where apples have failed this year?

DIANA IWI OF MEADWAY

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