

# Horticultural Society summer update

On a warm, sunny Saturday morning on May 16, a long queue formed at the gates of the newly refurbished Fellowship House for the Horticultural Society's renowned annual plant sale. Setting out the colourful bedding plants, perennials, herb and vegetable seedlings, the committee had made the most of the enlarged main hall indoors, but particularly enjoyed also using the lovely outside courtyard, where there was much more space than before to set up tables and for shoppers to move around, buy and chat. The very popular pelargoniums sold out within half an hour and by the end of the morning so did nearly everything else that Chris Page and his team had obtained from Finchley Nurseries, which provided most of the discounted plants. The allotments group also hosted a table with home-grown cuttings and seedlings, which were sold in aid of The North London Hospice.

Shoppers, exhausted by the excitement of having so many plants to choose from on their doorstep, were even able to relax over coffee and home-made cake at the Combat Stress armed forces mental health charity's

fashion sale going on at the same time next door in the small hall. Each of the two groups using Fellowship House at the same time felt they had benefited by the presence of the other.

The society's 279th Flower Show in June was also a great success, with a fantastic show of roses, in contrast to last year. Several children dressed up as bugs and butterflies (and anything else they fancied) and all won prizes for their efforts, presented by Chairman Chris Page. The next show will be held on Saturday September 12 at the Free Church Hall, when Grimdyke Brass will return to play in the garden from 3pm by popular request. Pictures of the show are on the back page.

In July members visited six beautiful gardens at Kenilworth, in Shropshire and in Cheshire on their fourth residential trip – much enjoyed despite torrential rain mixed with sunshine.

'Suburb in Bloom' 2015 was won by this year by Marjorie Harris, with Diane Berger and Chris Page joint second and Yvonne and Peter Oliver in third place. For up to date information about the society's activities, or to join, visit [www.hortsoc.co.uk](http://www.hortsoc.co.uk).

MARJORIE HARRIS



(Above) Queue awaiting opening of Plant Sale (Below) Diane Berger sells plants



## Gardening in late summer – containers for the lazy gardener



Tropical August

Herbaceous borders, so vibrant in June, can start to look a bit jaded now. It's time to shift the emphasis to container displays. Furthermore if you wish to enjoy the lazy days of summer with minimal effort then follow this guide to container gardening for the idle!

### EXISTING CONTAINERS – DAMAGE CONTROL

Firstly let us deal with existing containers that may be losing vigour, needing increasing attention to maintain a half decent display. For summer displays, water loss is the biggest killer, followed by failure to deadhead, causing annuals to set seed and cease flower production. If you have a series of small pots, group them together; this makes watering easier, creates a microclimate, and has stronger visual impact. Take a look at the stunning displays at Great Dixter for inspiration.

For those who have dead-headed and fed their displays weekly and watered twice daily, feel free to sneer at my non-PC approach, for your baskets and tubs will bloom right through until the first frosts. Others like myself who are time poor and undisciplined, consign those leggy lobelias and sticky petunias to the compost bin. Replace with self-deadheading begonias

and fuchsias, probably all Reduced To Clear at your local nurseries. Poke a couple of slow release fertiliser pellets into each container and water well. There is no escape from daily watering at the height of the summer, but a good drench rather than a sprinkle will get displays over the worst if you do forget a day here or there.

### STARTING FROM SCRATCH

If you are starting from scratch why not try something completely different? Go for the largest containers you can get; they have more room for permanent planting to mature, create more visual impact and require less watering. For year round interest plant a permanent centre piece, using small evergreens like hebes, or deciduous shrubs with interesting stem structure like contorted willow. Surround with perennials for summer colour: So called ground cover perennials such as ajuga or lamium only need cutting back in October, and will re-emerge in spring. Herbs are very decorative, fragrant and tasty. Add spring bulbs, which are available from nurseries from early autumn.

Alternatively go for a single plant per pot to build up a coordinated plant collection; include ferns, ornamental

grasses, heucheras, phormiums, fatsias for dramatic effect.

Permanent planting is the most labour saving option, however there are a few rules you cannot break. Look after your soil. Remove the top 2 inches of compost every spring and replace with fresh. Evergreens and perennials rarely need daily watering however do give them a good soak – about half a watering can per 18 inch diameter pot – every couple of days in summer, especially if in full sun. Feed shrubs with general purpose fertiliser in spring and every six weeks or so throughout summer. Feed flowering perennials with Tomorite a couple of times at the height of the season. Top off your displays with pebbles or gravel which as well as being decorative conserves moisture.

Sit pots in saucers filled with pebbles to increase water retention and humidity. For plants that prefer dry conditions terracotta pots are fine, however moisture lovers prefer non-porous glazed containers. In spring and again in high summer use a drench against vine weevil especially if you have heucheras or begonias.

In winter pots are unlikely to need much watering. As a guide, if the pot feels light, water sparingly. Remove saucers and stand containers on pot feet for maximum drainage, as the biggest killer is usually waterlogging not cold.

Finally if you are going on holiday, move your pots into the shade and water well prior to departure. Even better, install a leaky hose or drip irrigation system set to a timer.

CAROLINE BROOME



Interesting Groupings

## Suburb Rainfall

No hosepipe ban? No pleas to have showers rather than baths or reduce the number of showers we take? Last year's rain must have really filled the subsoil because there has been little to fill it this year. There was a total of 8.8 inches in the first half of this year, little more than three fifths of the average of nearly 14 inches. Only 0.36 inches fell in June so, at the time of writing, gardeners are praying for rain or thinking of the water bills as the automatic systems are turned on. The lack of moisture is made worse for plants by the

mini heat wave, which, of course, many might otherwise hope would not be too much of a mini one! Even January, with nearly 3 inches of rain was just short of normal, and the May total of just over 2 inches did not compensate for the very under average amounts of the other three months.

The only year since 1980 when the total for the first half was just lower than the current year's was 2005 when the rain for the year as a whole was also the lowest in these records. In 1996 the first half was less than

10 inches and the total for the year was the third lowest since these records began in 1980. So it may well be that we have another dry year while the 80% probability of rain promised by the Met for this afternoon has now been changed to 5% or 10%.

We will have to water the garden again. But we must remember that forecasting weather is a very difficult business. If it were not so, how could anyone make money by insuring outdoor events against the prospect of rain?

DIANA IWI FROM MEADWAY

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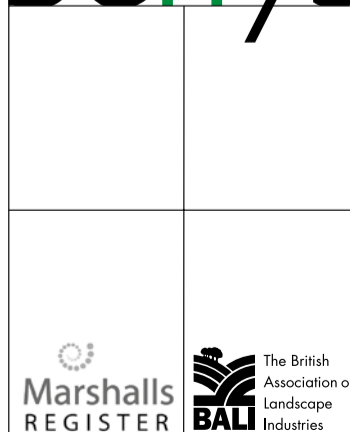
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