



Winter pruning and planting

Winter has been going on for a long time now. January and February might well be the coldest months of the year but there are a number of essential tasks that should be completed during this period. As the months progress and the days lengthen the careful observer will begin to notice the first tentative signs of spring whilst working in the winter garden.

January and February are ideal winter months to plant bare-root roses. As soon as you receive your bare root roses place them upright in a bucket of clean water for at least two hours prior to planting. Bare root plants must always be planted with wet roots, don't just plant them dry and water them after planting. Ideally bare-root roses should be planted immediately, but if this is not possible, then 'heal' them into a trench in the border, a temporary measure to prevent the roots drying out, until planting into their

permanent positions is possible. If you are not able to plant out for several weeks then plant temporarily in a container and keep the soil moist.

Select a sunny planting site with at least 6 hours of direct sunlight per day. Preparation is key to successful planting. Dig a hole deep and wide enough to comfortably accommodate the plant's roots, then fill the hole with water and allow this water to drain away. Mix the soil from the hole with an equal amount of organic matter and a handful of granular plant fertiliser, then place some of the mixture in the bottom of the planting hole, creating a cone-shaped mound. Finally, to promote strong root growth, and especially recommended to avoid rose sickness if you are planting a new rose on the site of an old one, sprinkle mycorrhizal fungi (Rootgrow) around the inside of the hole.

The planting hole is now ready to receive your rose!

Prune damaged or dead roots and stems then sprinkle mycorrhizal fungi evenly over the roots. Spread the roots of the rose over the mound and check planting depth and position: The neck of the rose should be positioned at the same level as it was grown in the field, with the bud union (the swollen part of the stem) above ground. Back fill the hole with the soil mixture, and create a shallow collar in the soil around the plant to stop the water from running away. Water in well. If this causes the rose to sink adjust the planting level by gently pulling the lower trunk upward. When happy, ensure that the soil around the rose is firmed into place to avoid air packets and to secure the plant. Mulch around the rose to reduce evaporation and to discourage weeds. Water daily for the first week and then check weekly for top ups.

Coppicing is a pruning technique where a tree or shrub

is cut to ground level, resulting in regeneration of new stems from the base. It is commonly used for rejuvenating old shrubs. February is your best opportunity to coppice large shrubs in your garden, such as sambucus, hazel and cotinus. Coppicing is useful in small gardens because it limits the size of the plant, turning it into a multi-stemmed shrub. Coppicing provides shelter for wildlife near eye level, and allows more light through to the understorey plants than would a mature tree. Bulbs and ground cover plants are more likely to flourish under coppiced trees than under large specimens. In shrubs primarily grown for their coloured stems, such as salix and cornus, it promotes vivid new growth to replace older faded stems.

Pruning ground level branches and stems up to about 40cm above the soil, a process called skirt pruning, will allow light and air to the base of the

plant, preventing a build-up of pests and diseases and encouraging underplanting to spread and thrive. This practice is especially effective under topiary, or other evergreens

such as viburnum tinus, laurel and pittosporum. Lifting the canopy of weeping trees like Kilmarnock willow will have much the same effect.

CAROLINE BROOME



Suburb rainfall

In this column in the last Suburb News it was suggested that climate change may be resulting in cooler, wetter summers. Now we are being warned that milder, wetter winters may become more usual. In both cases wetter seems to be the operative word and parts of the country have experienced this to their cost. Angry accusations fly back and forth about flood defences and why so much water is being allowed to flow where.

At least in the Suburb, there is a presumption against front gardens being paved over and thus exacerbating flooding. Whether that would really have provided the desired protection here was not, however, put to the test. Along with much of the South East, we not only have not had the recent excessive rainfall experienced in the North and the West, we have actually had less than usual. The total precipitation for the

year, at just over 26 inches was well below the average of over 30 inches. The November total of 3 inches was very slightly above average but October, with 2.6 inches, and December, with 2.1 inches, were well below norm. Comments on temperature are offered hesitantly as these records are not necessarily as accurate as they should be. However, higher temperatures are part of climate change and help to drive more extremes of rainfall. Also, when the December average was measured in Meadway as 5 degrees C or 8 degrees F above the average for the last 15 years, as there is some approximation to accuracy the changes are significant. The temperature average for December was 3 degrees Celsius above the previous highest in December 2004.

So, milder, wetter or not, certainly greyer, are we really enjoying winter more?

DIANA IWI FROM MEADWAY



Olivia Redman

Zara Shattock

The Horticultural Society's 101st Annual General Meeting was held at Fellowship House on 10 November 2015. Chairman Chris Page reported on another successful year despite difficult growing conditions, with excellent shows, outings and membership participation.

He was very keen for the society to have links with as

many Suburb organisations as possible, so it had been pleasing that 'outreach' over the year had included regular support for Garden Suburb School's Nature Garden, a very successful visit by Annemount School to the Chairman's garden, first contact with Brooklands School in connection with a new small gardening project and two hands-on miniature garden-making and planting events for children under 10 at Garden Suburb Community Library during the school holidays.

All the existing officers and members of the Hort Soc committee were re-elected and James Robbins was co-opted at the end of the meeting.

At the start of the meeting, cups and prizes in the Junior classes were awarded jointly to Rosa-Courry-Reid and Zara

Shattock (the Winifred Price Cup), to Olivia Redman (the Jack Rumbold Children's Cup) and to Melissa Redman (The Tony Holton Award). Adult cups, medals and other awards were presented after the AGM by Vice-President Joan Rees Phillips. They included the award of the Leonard Potiphar Cup for Best Veg in the September Show to first-time shower and winner Ian Davidson.

Ian may well have set a precedent, as both shows in 2016, to be held at the Free Church Hall on 11 June and 10

September, will include a special section for 'first-timers' who have never competed before in any of our shows. If that includes you and you would like to have a go, please join the society and you will get full details and as much help as you need from the show coordinator or any member of the show committee (8455 8741, yvonne.oliver17@gmail.com, www.hortsoc.co.uk).

The full programme for 2016 will appear in the society's quarterly members' newsletters and in Suburb News What's On.

MARJORIE HARRIS



Joan Rees Phillips presents to Ian Davidson and Michael Franklin



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