

## Working with Nature

Nature is all very well, but don't let her take over completely! Self-sown shrubs and suckering climbers sneak up on you and, before you know it, they are shading and invading entire sections of your garden, devouring less dominant plants in their wake. Even if you like the wild and natural look, remember that all domestic gardens are contrived: they are a completely unnatural creation. So if you want to get the balance right, then you have to compromise and that means finding ways of sharing your outside space with Mother Nature.

Ivy is an attractive way of covering large bare surfaces quickly but if left to its own devices will creep insidiously up tree trunks, through hedges and flowerbeds, choking as it goes, sucking up moisture and nutrients. The trick is to keep it in check from the word Go by hard pruning in late winter and early autumn. Otherwise once it's taken hold, you'll need a tree surgeon or a rotator to get it out, or aggressive weed



Pruning self sown holly up and back to reveal magnolia

killer rendering whole borders off limits for up to a year.

On the other hand, pulling up six-month old growth from the back of a border isn't difficult; don't yank it causing it to snap, tease it out at its

shallow rooted points. If it's started tracing its way up a tree, prise the strands of ivy from the trunk, being careful not to damage the bark. If it's too far gone around the trunk, sever all shoots at the base of the tree and again about 2 inches up the trunk, removing the isolated sections in between – single cuts can regrow. Leftovers will dry up, turn brown and rot off in due course. If its smothered the trunk and invaded the canopy, then it's likely you'll need the expertise of a tree surgeon to remove it, so why not skirt prune it back to the trunk instead? Go high enough to liberate existing shrubs underneath.

Unravelling ivy from hedges is not for the impatient gardener! Just get your (gloved) hand in there and methodically untangle tendrils from the host stems. The amount of light and air this lets through a hedge is essential for its vigour and longevity. You can also lay moisture permeable membrane over previously congested ground, cover with bark, and plant flowering shade lovers, but don't get complacent; ivy has a way of inveigling itself where the sun don't shine! Avoid pruning ivy during nesting season, and do

leave a few berries overwinter as food for the birds.

Self-sown seedlings and suckers quickly root themselves; after all, they have chosen their spot naturally for their optimum chance of survival. As well as ivy seedlings, look out for holly and sycamore, which root deeply and colonise quickly. Holly seedlings quickly grow into lax shrubby trees, throwing out spiky wands all the way up their trunks; if you like the shelter and privacy they have created, but not at the cost of their more decorative neighbours, skirt prune. To reduce their canopies take the hedge trimmers to them.

Forsythia is one of the worst suckering shrubs, making itself at home up to a metre away from its parent plant. To get rid of it, dig out the under-ground stem right back to the host shrub, sever it at source and remove the entire section. And as for wild garlic, don't get me started! Well-established through-out the suburb, wild garlic colonises by seed as well as bulb, so don't let it flower. Once it has invaded your borders the only way to eradicate it is to dig it up; easier said than done if it's mingling with your snow-drops and bluebells!

CAROLINE BROOME



Skirt pruning ivy up host tree

## Suburb rainfall

At the time of writing, April is behaving entirely as it should. The sun appeared briefly this morning; the showers have been heavier this afternoon; there is promise of the wonderful flowers that March winds and April showers are meant to bring forth in May.

The present brief, and very welcome, warm spell will be, we are assured, displaced by a cold spell tomorrow. As the blackthorn is out on the Heath, maybe this will be Buchan's cold spell that blackthorn is supposed to be associated with.

January and March were rather wetter than usual. As the beginning of January was wetter than the end, and the end of March had rather more rainfall

than the first part, it might have been expected that gardening could have been done. However, our heavy clay seemed to have retained as much moisture as usual and be very reluctant to relinquish any fork pushed into it. The drier than average February did not seem to allow the soil to dry out much, probably because the days are so short and there were few frosts to break it up. In the entire winter period there was only one day, or rather night, with snow, December 16, and, even then, it started as rain.

Gardeners could find that the very mild weather means that more pests than usual escaped being killed off and will survive to plague us.

DIANA IWI FROM MEADWAY

## What's On with the Horticultural Society

Starting with a coach trip to Wickham Place and Ulting Wick on May 11 and its own popular Plant Sale on Saturday May 14, the Horticultural Society has a full programme planned to help you enjoy Summer in the Suburb.

The Flower Show on June 11 will join in with the Queen's 90th birthday celebrations, with royal themes running through the flower arranging and the children's fancy dress parade, which we hope will be judged by Hon President Jonathan Ross (to be confirmed).

If you have never competed before, this year we have a special category for first-timers in this show and the one in September. We hope this will help you to pluck up courage to show off your own baking, preserving or flower and veg-growing skills without having to compete against the 'old-timers'.

MARJORIE HARRIS

The Suburb in Bloom competition for the best Suburb garden will be judged on June 22 and Patricia Larsen (patsy\_larsen@yahoo.co.uk) would love to hear from more residents willing to enter their lovely Suburb gardens.

On Sunday July 17 there will be a coach trip to visit Chenies Manor's amazing plant fair.

Full details of all activities can be found in the Suburb News What's On diary, or see them at [www.hortsoc.co.uk](http://www.hortsoc.co.uk), and at the same time join the society for regular newsletters, and info on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Watch out too for the yellow posters advertising gardens open in aid of charity in the Suburb or nearby north-west London for the National Gardens Scheme in June and July, or by appointment from May to September.



Jonathan Ross at the 2014 show

## Six gardens open for charity this summer

Six of HGS Horticultural Society's members will open their gardens in and around the Suburb this summer, to raise much-needed funds for the National Gardens Scheme charities such as Marie Curie, Macmillan Cancer Support, Hospice UK, The Carers' Trust, The Queen's Nursing Institute, Perennial, Parkinsons UK and the Cavell Nurses' Trust, among some others.

You will be able to meet friends for tea on each date and find plants for sale at some of them. You can pick up a copy of the London Gardens 2016 booklet at Fellowship House,

Willifield Way, or see full details of opening times, prices and what's on offer at the following gardens at [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk):

- 79 Church Lane, N2 0TH (12 June, 31 July),
- 74 Willifield Way, NW11 6YJ (19 June),
- 18 Park Crescent, N3 2NJ (19 June, 17 July),
- 4 Asmunds Hill, NW11 6ET (24 July),
- 86 Willifield Way, NW11 6YJ (24 July),
- 48 Erskine Hill, NW11 6HG (by appointment only this year May-September 8455 6507).

MARJORIE HARRIS



Diane Berger, 86 Willifield Way



Yvonne Oliver, 4 Asmunds Hill



Marjorie Harris, 48 Erskine Hill

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