

Ring the changes – winter 2016/17



Dwarf Cornus Kousa

The years seem to go by more quickly the older you get, and I bet you have been looking out at roughly the same winter scene in your garden New Year after New Year. You've been feeling vaguely dissatisfied with the same old same old, but somehow events overtake and you get lulled into a false sense of satisfaction, as spring heralds a colourful froth of perennials which effectively mask irritations.

On New Year's Day I walked around my tired brown garden and decided enough was enough! There it was, all imperfections and imbalances laid bare, and no amount of excuses could delay the inevitable. Thugs must go,

snipers reigned in, forgotten gems exposed. However easy it is to make excuses not to take action – too frosty, too wet, too cold – there will be days when the crisp winter sun offers an ideal opportunity to get outside and put matters straight while you can see what's really going on. As the old Scandinavian saying goes "There is no such thing as bad weather only bad clothing," so dress up warmly, gather your tools and off you go.

All gardens are contrived. Nature will encourage seeds to grow where they like, not where it suits us, so any small tree seedlings like holly, sycamore or oak need to be extracted now while you can see them: Otherwise before you know it they will have surreptitiously grown into saplings amongst the summer undergrowth, requiring surgical removal this time next year! Shrubs that were planted pleasingly equidistant from each other the year you moved into your house are now fighting for supremacy or half dead at the back. Yes, the label told you they would grow to 3m in ten

years, but who looks ahead that far? 20 years ago I planted a 1ft tall spotted laurel in my narrow shady border where my limited horticultural experience told me nothing else would grow. About 10 years ago I started having to hack it back every three months just to keep it in proportion with the rest of the maturing border, sacrificing its lovely red berries as a result – a sad specimen indeed. But fortunately our knowledge grows along with the plants and so, better late than never, I am finally going to put it out of its misery and replace it with a beautiful dwarf cornus kousa, an altogether more

Pruned back into proportion



delicate deciduous specimen shrub that can be pruned appropriately to enjoy its graceful foliage, white bracts, raspberry-like berries and autumn colour.

So if there is a shrub you really don't like, now is the time to remove it, while you can get to it during the dormant season. If it's mature do take the necessary precautions: two pairs of hands are better than one for this heavy duty task. You will need a good couple of hours, sturdy clothing, a hessian sack, a good saw, sharp secateurs and an empty recycle bin. Cut it down by stages until finally you can dig up & dispose of the stump with the root ball.

A climbing rose in full flower scrambling through a mature canopy of shrubs is a glorious sight to behold, but once the leaves have fallen, if all you can see is a rampant mass of half dead tangled stems reminiscent of Sleeping Beauty's hedge, get yourself a sturdy ladder, strong ties and some Dutch courage, and start pruning and training it into submission! First cut out dead stems. (Don't underestimate the damage you can do to yourself when pulling out whippy lengths; heavy duty gloves and eye protection are a must.) Shorten any wispy lengths that are growing in the wrong direction then tie in the major lateral branches horizontally to sturdy supports. Finally shorten the vertical shoots coming off the laterals to 2 or 3 buds as these will produce next year's flowers.

Although its perfectly OK to move smaller shrubs on a frost free winter's day, now is not yet the time to prune evergreens. That comes soon enough in late winter to early spring. Apart from trimming back the odd waywood stem of deciduous shrubs to keep a balanced shape,



Climbing rose Souvenir du Docteur Jamain

the time to prune these is generally after flowering. Don't be in such a hurry to fill any resultant gaps; you may find you prefer an open vista once the ground cover and perennials start springing up. Indeed it's likely they will actually start performing better with less competition for light and water.

Most of all, how noble will you feel when you can look out at your winter garden without wincing at the howlers. No more averting your eyes guiltily from those nagging irritations. And think of all those new plants opportunities to look forward to...

CAROLINE BROOME

Horticultural News

On Tuesday 8 November 2016, the Hampstead Garden Suburb Horticultural society held their 102nd Annual General meeting at Fellowship House. Chairman Chris Page reported on another successful year for the society with a full calendar of well-attended and informative events, excellent shows and popular outings. Despite the nuances of the weather, growers had managed to fill the benches at the autumn show with an impressive bounty of vegetables and flowers. All of the existing officers and members of the Horticultural Society's committee were re-elected to their positions.

The meeting started with the presentations of awards for the year. The Junior classes were awarded to Rosa Coury-Reid (the Winifred Price Cup), to Olivia Redman (the Jack Rumbold Children's Cup) and to Melissa Redman (the Tony Horton Award). Ken Murrell was the winner of the Championship vase, Chris Page won the RHS Banksian Medal, and the HGS Millennium Cup for best garden in the 'Suburb in Bloom' was won by David Weinberg.

The 2017 Horticultural society events kicked off in January with a chance for members to pit their wits against fellow gardeners at the society's quiz night at Fellowship house on Saturday 21st January.

On Thursday February 23 the society will be taking a group of gardeners to see the renowned winter gardens at Anglesey Abbey near Cambridge. On Thursday the 9th of March you can exchange seeds of your favourite flowers or prizewinning veg at the society's annual seed

swap at Fellowship house, which will include a talk about heritage vegetables from a member of the Heritage Seed Library.

To celebrate 90 years of the National Gardens Scheme opening gardens across England and Wales for charity, Hampstead Garden Suburb will see some of its most beautiful gardens opening as a group. On Sunday 25 June 12 noon-5.30pm, nine private gardens and one allotment site will be open to the public. There will be home made teas at fellowship house, face-painting and a treasure trail for the children and two professional nurseries selling seasonal plants. It promises to be an unmissable occasion so mark it in your diaries now.

For more details of upcoming events and how to join, go to the society's website at www.hortsoc.co.uk or look in the 'What's on' section of Suburb News. You can also follow the Horticultural Society on Facebook or Twitter – @HGShortsoc for all the latest news and events.

JAMES ROBBINS



Rosa Coury-Reid and her grandmother, Sylvia Coury receive their prizes from Vice-President Michael Franklin

We were interested to read about the hedgehog monitoring programme undertaken by the Heath Ecology Team. We thought you might be interested to hear about our own small part in the attempt to increase and preserve hedgehogs in our area.

Over the past two years we have adopted and released eight hedgehogs, from the Trent Park Wildlife Rescue and Ambulance Service. The Rescue Centre was set up many years ago, to provide a safe haven and specialist vet support for injured or abandoned wild life in the area. Amongst a wide range of wonderful work undertaken under the skill and guidance of its founder, June Smitherman OBE and her husband Barry, the Centre treats and nurtures injured and young, underweight hedgehogs with a view to finding places where they can be safely returned to the wild.

On the three occasions we have been privileged to receive the hedgehogs, they have previously been brought back to health and to a weight which enables them to hibernate safely and to find their own way again. We, and our garden and its surroundings, have been carefully vetted, ensuring that the young animals have the freedom to roam across a large area, unimpeded by walls and

fences. We have also been given careful instructions on feeding and habitat (no milk, and meat based dog/cat food!) and have been delighted with the diminishing slug population in our garden.

Each time we have brought back two or three young hedgehogs, we have invited neighbours and their children to come and quietly see them before release, at night. Between us, in the eight houses in our close, there is huge excitement if there are any sightings. Until this autumn, we had seen just one or two on a couple of occasions – but recently have been delighted to receive visits from one young hedgehog, who is now feeding regularly on our own patio and rapidly gaining weight ready for hibernation.

We hope this could be the offspring of one of 'our' adopted adults but we will never know for sure. All we do know is that with eight healthy young hedgehogs roaming across our land, there is a good chance that this may give rise to a much-needed increase in a threatened population. If you're interested to know more, to visit or support the work of the Centre, go to www.wrasenfieldwildlife.org.uk or email lindaroselondon@gmail.com.

LINDA & DAVID ROSE

More hedgehogs about the Suburb



Suburb rainfall

By September of last year it began to look as though 2016 would look like a rather dry year overall. By January 1 this year it could be seen to have been the second driest since these North London records began 37 years ago. In 2016 there were only 22.6 inches, compared with an average of 30.1 inches. However, in 2005 there was even less, at 21.8 inches, while the highest figure for a whole year was 41.6 inches in 2003. December's rainfall, at less than half an inch, was the lowest ever recorded here and can be compared with just over 6 inches in 2002 and 1989. No wonder the English keep talking about the weather!

October is on average our wettest month but this year it was only a third of its normal quantity, slightly compensated for by over three inches in November.

Quite how plants manage to adapt to these large variations in moisture from year to year is a (very welcome) mystery. As usual, there were splendid displays in the garden with pretty minimal watering. Never have the hardy fuchsias been so eye-catching. However, somehow, despite the low rainfall, the grass seemed to need too frequent mowing.

DIANA IWI
FROM MEADWAY

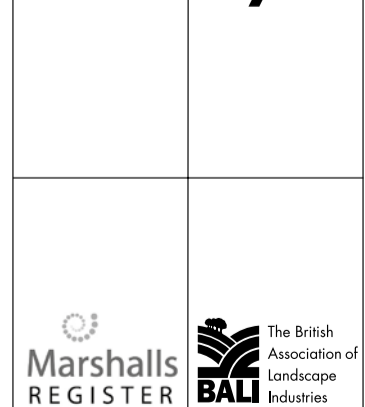
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