

Revamping an herbaceous border



Before...



... and after.

So, like me, you have been tending your plot for 20 odd years. You have nurtured it season after season, aiming for some vague notion of perfection that's floating around in your mind's eye. But the glorious tableau created at the height of summer always seems to lose its balance by autumn. Thug overshadowing gentler neighbours, sprawling crowns of standard shrubs starving light from sun loving perennials, which refuse to flower as a result. Ground cover has flopped all over the lawn edges, the hybrid teas are so tall that their blooms can be seen from space, bulbs that flowered years ago only producing leaves.

You could make adjustments by lifting and dividing, moving or removing only certain plants. Indeed autumn is the ideal time to do this while the soil is still warm. But after a while repeating this method piecemeal is just not enough, leaving the border looking fragmented. It is time to start again.

Before you plunge in, choose one border at a time, in order to minimize overall disruption to

the garden. Start by taking a long hard look at the offending area. Decide what works and what does not, which plants you want to keep and which you would rather relocate or give away. Maybe you have new additions you wish to incorporate into the new scheme. Now would also be a good time to enlarge or reshape borders. Draw up a plan on paper, roughly to scale, marking up areas of full sun, part shade and full shade, dry or moist. As a rule of thumb planting is all about layers: Small trees or large shrubs first, then perennials, traditionally tallest at back graduating to shortest at front, followed by ground cover and bulbs.

Here is an annoying adage for you from my glorious years in retail management: Failure to prepare, prepare to fail. With this in mind these are the Must Haves of the exercise: A ground sheet to spread over the adjacent lawn or paving, and plenty of empty compost sacks, rubble bags and large plastic pots for use as temporary storage of lifted plants. Whilst you are at

it, you might as well condition the soil, so stock up on multi-purpose compost, well-rotted manure and horticultural grit. It is worth buying a packet of Root Grow, mycorrhizal fungi, to promote strong new root growth. Tools for the job are border fork and spade, hand fork & trowel, scoop, secateurs and loppers.

- Remove perennials first as it gets them out of harm's way, creating better access to all areas. Store plants temporarily with some fresh multipurpose compost in large pots or sacks. In theory they can stay containerised indefinitely if kept moist and stored in a sheltered area, but try to replant them before temperatures drop to give them time to settle into warm soil.

- Take the opportunity to divide perennials as you lift them. This will not only rejuvenate them but will also create more visual impact when replanting in groups.

- Next to go should be any unwanted shrubs. It is a good idea to cut top growth down before digging out, as less

cumbersome to handle. Do get help when lifting large root balls.

- Shrubs destined to stay put can be pruned at this time to rejuvenate & create a better shape. Removing the lowest branches to reveal the stem gives a shrub a certain elegance, as well as letting in light and air and creating further planting opportunities at soil level.

- Weed the border thoroughly, ensuring deep rooted culprits are completely removed.

Once the border is cleared, it is time to recondition the soil. It is likely that you have heavy clay soil, so add copious amounts of grit mixed 50/50 with multi-purpose compost. No need to dig it in; it will be worked into the existing soil as you replant.

Leaving the best 'til last, it is time to plant up your new border. Lay all the plants out in their desired positions first, preferably in groups of threes or fives, using your newly divided clumps. Space about 9 inches apart for a dense effect. For a natural informal look, avoid straight lines; better to plant in drifts or triangles. Step back every so

often to see if the combinations are pleasing on the eye; rearranging now is far easier than after planting! When planting, work from the back of the border to the front, so as not to compact the completed areas. Dig a hole twice the size of the root ball, sprinkle RootGrow into the hole and onto roots, then plant up, working in the new compost and grit.

Once everything is planted, give the borders a thorough watering (yes, even if it is raining) then finally apply a 2 inch layer of well-rotted manure mulch, being careful to avoid the crowns of plants.

Water well about once a week especially if it is a dry autumn, then sit back and anticipate the results next Spring.

CAROLINE BROOME



Border rejuvenated



Glorious colours of the Alstroemeria on show. See pictorial review on back page.

284th Flower Show

On Saturday, September 9 The Free Church Hall was transformed into a green oasis by the cornucopia of floral and vegetable delights at the 284th Flower show of the HGS Horticultural Society.

The heavy showers that punctuated the day did not put off the gardening public who visited the show to see the fantastic floral displays and delicious looking fruit & veg the green-fingered members of the society had put together. There was live music from the Grimsdyke brass band, and some of the best

baking the Suburb has to offer was available to refresh the guests.

There was a total of 282 entries on the day with an excellent showing and high standard of competition in the dahlia, apple and tomato classes, which all proved popular. The veg tug category, often described as the decathlon of the show, was once again hotly contested, but the show was quite possibly stolen by a fantastically eccentric four foot-long Tromboccino squash entered in the unusual vegetable category (see back page).

Horticultural Society winners – again!

Wednesday, October 4 was a good night for Hampstead Garden Suburb Horticultural Society, as committee members Caroline Broome and Diane Berger, won the London Gardens Society All London Championship for the second year running for Best Small, and Large Back Gardens respectively at The Guildhall against fierce London-wide opposition. A lot of hard work

and knowledge goes into both these gardens, which are also open annually as part of The National Garden Scheme and other charities.

And this is also good news for Suburb News readers as well because you can benefit from Caroline's wisdom and experience by following her regular gardening column on this page.



Suburb rainfall

We always like to feel that the Suburb is a very special place to live and that it leads the way in how to make the most of its surroundings. But change the weather just for our benefit?

The last rainfall column in Suburb News explained that the very low rainfall in the first half of the year had left the ground very dry and gardens crying out for water. There seemed to be little rain forecast.

Thank you, perhaps, to whoever did the rain dance, for, on July 11, down came the rain, a whole 1.4 inches of it. Then, just in case too much had run off on the dry, baked, ground, there was a thunderstorm at night on July 18, and then more rain in the rest of the month to give a total of 3.6 inches, well above average. August, too, had rainfall well above the norm.

Over the year so far, the dry first six months have outweighed

the effects of the summer rainfall, to give a somewhat, but not very, below average amount for 2017. There is no real suggestion of any clear correlation between the amounts in the first nine months of the year and the final annual total. So, as usual, we must just wait and see.

And, as usual, plants seem to have coped very well, in spite of laziness in getting out the hose.

DIANA IWI FROM MEADWAY



Four Seasons GARDEN MAINTENANCE

- Weekly or fortnightly maintenance contract
- Garden clearance
- Lawn care (mowing, turfing, fertilisation etc.)
- Planting
- Weed killing & treatment
- Hedge trimming, tree works
- Patio cleaning
- All general garden services

We offer a professional, reliable service with 10 years of experience at an affordable price. Call Roland or leave a message for a free quote.

07584 574520 • fourseasonsgarden@hotmail.com

JOSHUA BERGER
CARPENTRY

For all your professional carpentry needs

I specialise in all domestic and commercial carpentry to the highest possible standards. Professional decorating services also managed with over 10 years of excellence.

Call now for a free quotation

07811 911 389

joshuabergercarpentry.com