

Going exotic in the garden



Earlier in the year I mentioned that I was going 'exotic' in my garden and planted my containers with Canna. My friend and guru advised me to start the rhizomes in a heated greenhouse in early March to give them a really good kick start. Not having used my paraffin heater for years, I was amazed to discover how difficult it was to find a supply. I used to buy it in Temple Fortune from a man who had a huge tank in the back of his shop. He would funnel it into my old tin can and I would go on my merry way. Not any more. I eventually found a source in North Finchley where it is sold

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only in white sealed plastic containers. The price was staggering, it is not tuppence a gallon any more - £3.50 for four litres is more the mark. As we had the longest, coldest spring since time began, this proved to be an expensive exercise.

My plants were fed and heated better than those of anyone I know, and they grew and grew. Eventually when spring arrived I planted them in containers and waited. The foliage was magnificent but no sign of flowers.

As the months rolled by, flower spikes did appear. Then in September I went away on holiday for two weeks and they bloomed, or so my neighbours told me; apparently they were quite stunning!

Last year on one of my trips (with chums) we discovered a plant nursery that was quite outstanding (Marchants Hardy Plants, Laughton, East Sussex. 01323 811737). The owner has a very good eye and if any plants throw a sport which he considers garden worthy he grows them on and watches very closely for

stable characteristics and longevity. His plant association is very good, colours and shapes are intermingled with soft grasses and the whole effect is quite beautiful. He grows a lot of Crocosmia, beautiful upright varieties. I saw a deep yellow with very large flowers called Warburton Yellow planted next to a copper Helenium Rubinzweg. I have never been fond of yellow/orange colours, but even I have been converted and am now the proud owner of a yellow-copper corner in my garden. Added to this corner will be Crocosmia Emily McKenzie, deep orange with a maroon throat and a very tall one, pale orange with very striking copper foliage, called Gerbe D'Or. A few Achillea terracotta, and my corner will be perfect.

I always find the colours in late autumn so wonderful and always wish I had more space for those gems which really only come into their own in winter. The list of a acers is endless - some are quite large but many are suitable for smaller town gardens. Plants with lovely fat red berries - Skimmia, Pyracantha and a Berberis, Ottawensis purpurea - the list is endless.

I am sure by now you have cut down perennials, weeded and, hopefully, mulched your garden. Years ago everything practically came to a halt in garden centres, but not nowadays. Even in November and December we can still buy little pot plants just to pop in a space that we have overlooked. The small Cyclamens are my favourite. Their colours of pale pink through to an outrageous shocking-pink and deep red are just right for Christmas. They may not be as hardy as Cyclamen coum, but at £1.95 they are cheaper than a bunch of flowers and possibly last a bit longer.

The Rare Plant Sale at the Royal Free Hospital in September was not a disappointment. I picked up a very good Kniphofia John Benary (red hot poker) in a hot orange, another gem for my orange/yellow border. So many unusual plants were on sale that it was a very good day.

The time is slowly creeping towards Christmas and we start thinking of gifts. A very nice one would be a two-week trip to Antigua but, failing that, a small saw with a retractable blade for pruning. Not much to choose between the two, really!

Good Christmas and Good Gardening.

DIANE BERGER

Suburb rainfall

St Swithin's Day was dry and over the next forty days rainfall, at 1.4 in, was well below the average for that period, 2.7 in. So it works! The ancient saying 'If St Swithin's Day be wet, for forty days t'is rain you'll get; if St Swithin's Day be fair, for forty days t'will rain no more' is true - or is it? Unfortunately a further investigation of past records indicates that the converse has occurred just as frequently, and a real short-term pattern to our weather still eludes us.

July and August, with less than four inches in total, were somewhat below average, although the mean is only a 4.3 in for the two months together. Following a dry June, this indeed mean the hosepipes were needed.

It was September that provided the real excitement. Unfortunately, I was away on the Friday the heavens opened so the total for that day is, sadly, unavailable. During the six days over the period there was 3.3 in of rain, and that by itself is very unusual. No wonder weather forecasters were talking of saturated ground. In Meadway the downpours do seem to have nicely loosened up the previously dry and cracked soil, leaving it easily worked, but no doubt in lower-lying areas with even more rainfall further west, there would be real problems.

The final total for September was 4.3 in, well above the average of 2.5 in.

DIANA IWI

Picking on the elderly

Burglary Artifice is one of the most abhorrent of crimes involving the elderly and this borough has more recorded incidents than anywhere else in the Metropolitan area.

Earlier this year there were three such crimes on the Suburb. In Denison Close two men, aged about 25, tricked their way into a house and stole a lady's Swiss watch and diamond and gold jewellery. In Hill Close one of two men, aged between 35 and 40, distracted the lady occupier while the other sneaked into the house and stole her handbag. In Wildwood Road two men posing as workmen conned their way into a house to use the telephone and escaped with a purse.

PC Danny Candler from the Serious Crimes Group based at Colindale said victims are carefully targeted - mostly the affluent elderly and many are frail, confused, or immobile.

"Only 2% of these offences were solved in 1999 and only one in ten get reported. These criminals target up to 15 people a day and come face to face with their victims, but often they are too embarrassed, shocked or confused to know what is happening," said PC Candler.

"Usually these crimes are carried out by highly professional groups aged as young as five years old up to about 70. The victim is distracted at the door by someone with the gift of the gab while their accomplices rifle the house.

They travel down here from all over the country, adopting regional accents to disguise their identity and pose as utility workers, social workers, odd-job



men, Help-the-Aged and even Police Officers. They concentrate on side roads and park their vehicles within easy reach for a quick getaway."

They follow Meals on Wheels and stalk their victims from the shops. After the arrest of one criminal he admitted committing 15 offences every Thursday because it was pension day.

"It isn't difficult for these villains to find a house with easy pickings," said PC Candler. "Dirty windows and curtains are a good indication that the person inside is immobile. They also look for houses with cream and dark green paintwork, handrails, intercoms, a single milk bottle on the step, unkempt gardens, and hedges."

"They often smear the front door spy hole with saliva so that

the occupant cannot see who is on the doorstep and has to open the door. Some using this tactic have been caught through DNA," added PC Candler.

How can we help our vulnerable neighbours?

Try to befriend them, cut their hedges, tidy up their gardens, and make sure their windows and curtains are clean. Explain the dangers of allowing strangers into their homes and get them to understand the importance of asking utility callers for their customer number. Convince them of the dangers of keeping a lot of money in their homes.

Call 999 immediately if you see anyone you don't recognise knocking on an elderly person's door. Remember you too will be old one day.

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