

Gardening in the spring



With the welcome advent of spring it would be easy to consign the unrelenting gales and downpours of the winter to nothing but a bad memory, but the aftermath is all too prominent in our gardens right now. Lawns, borders and paths have all taken an immense battering in their own ways.

Hampstead Garden Suburb is renowned for its neat lawns, clipped hedges and well stocked borders but as it sits on heavy clay many gardens have become waterlogged as a result. Water collected in the channels at border edges adjacent to the lawn failed to drain away, borders covered in a cap of algae and soil washed away exposing plant roots to the elements, moss colonized lawns, and paths dangerously slimy. But action taken now as part of the spring freshen up should alleviate these problems for the coming season. Many residents are concerned that prolonged saturation will have rotted plant roots causing

large sections of their borders to die back, but luckily as there have been no accompanying heavy frosts to freeze wet roots to death, most healthy established plants should be OK, but only time will tell.

So first things first, the dreaded health and safety! Ensure your paths are made safe now. A pressure washer is fine on extensive hard landscaped areas however where plants are growing in cracks and crevices, or adjacent to borders, it might be wiser to use a chemical patio cleaner, or Jeyes fluid and a stiff brush. Pressure washers produce an inordinate amount of water! Any trees that were damaged in the gales should be professionally pruned. Broken branches should be cleanly cut back to avoid infection and to safe guard you and your underplanted borders from falling limbs.

Next attend to the lawn. Scarifying your lawn then aerating it with a hollow tined fork is labour intensive but is a vital step to recovery. Then brush lawn sand into the holes to further aid drainage.



Once exposed to dry weather moss will start to dry out and can be raked off in due course. Extensive bald patches can be sown with lawn seed. Finally you can apply a weed and feed lawn dressing.

Now the borders can be rejuvenated. Although we didn't have a cold winter most nutrients in the soil will have been washed out by the rain, leaving the soil impoverished and probably covered in a fine layer of algae in shady places. Gently break up the surface cap of the soil with a border fork allowing it to breath, scrape off the algae, and then apply granule fertilisers and finally a mulch. Although the surface of the soil may be dry, heavy clay is likely to still be soggy just below the surface, so avoid walking on it as compaction will push out air pockets and damage soil structure. It's also advisable to apply grit and compost to planting holes when planting to allow new plants to breath and spread their roots out.

A mild winter is not only more comfortable for us

humans, but is kind to pests. In a cold winter these are killed off but I have noticed greenfly colonising on new shoots and roses already. You can use a chemical spray, or opt for organic methods such as nematode drenches, or good old diluted Fairy Liquid sprayed over affected plants. Snails and particularly slugs will have colonised the underside of your pots and rockeries, and your greenhouse staging, so be vigilant now as they are particularly partial to young shoots. Roses have been reluctant to shed last year's leaves, so if you haven't defoliated them during pruning do so now as they may be harbouring black spot spores. Make sure you try & pick up every last leaf to avoid soil contamination.

For a real belt and braces approach to roses that have become weakened after several years of black spot you can try and steal a march on it by spraying with a rose fungicide even before they put on any leaf growth. Now go enjoy!

CAROLINE BROOME

Down the allotment What to do about all that rain?... the answer lies in the soil

The rain it raineth every day... that is how it seemed during the first two months of the year and with more rain falling in most parts of the country than in any winter since records began in 1910 there were only a few exceptional days when the rain did not fall. For Suburb horticulturists, standing water on most of the allotment sites was not a particularly unusual sight at the time of year, and certainly not to be compared with the inundations elsewhere. But the effects of all this water on the soil, and the soil's ability to sustain a wide variety of flowers and vegetables, as well as the weeds and the worts, should not be overlooked. The soil, in short, needs a replacement of those nutrients which will have been washed into the clayey depths and away. Which is why many allotmenters have been applying a slow-release fertiliser as a general feed to their plots in advance of planting.

It is difficult to specify which nutrients suffer the most in such saturated conditions, but the application generally of a fertiliser containing the basic Big Three nutrients – nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium – can be nothing but beneficial, improving the chances later in the year of a more fruitful harvest. Nitrogen will promote leaf growth, phosphorus benefits root development and potassium bolsters a plant against disease and poor soil conditions.

The application of manure, in addition to a bought fertilizer and not as a substitute for it, further aids the soil's health, particularly because of the

micronutrients it contains. A well-rotted organic compost serves a similar purpose in providing such trace nutrients as calcium, magnesium, manganese and iron. These trace elements in their own particular ways give protection against disease, over-acidity, yellowing or 'scorching' of leaves, stunted growth and poor storage and cooking capabilities.

One cannot speak too highly of decomposed organic matter – besides its feeding values it aerates the soil, it improves drainage and it retains moisture. Work it into the soil as often as you are able.

Kitchen waste in our house goes not into a brown bin but into a composting bin on my allotment where the table left-overs spend up to a year, mixed with grass cuttings and other green waste, being worked by worms and bacteria into a friable feast of goodness! Why, I have often wondered, should one use a local authority's brown bin service (provided at expense) when a compost bin at the back door would serve so well the modest of gardens?

Finally, once these practices and principles are established, then all that remains to be remembered is to rotate your crops, mulch around the new plants and water moderately and regularly. Ah, water. That brings us back to the beginning. Saturate your plants with too much water and their roots will be deprived of air, crippling them and making them prone to disease, thereby stunting plant growth. Flooding, it seems, does no one any good!

PETER HODGSON



An early spring view of the Chatham Close allotments site, beside Big Wood. The coming season is the seventh since the site was reclaimed from a jungle of rambling brambles, rampant raspberries and self-seeded horse chestnut and ash sproutings. After the original professional clearance of the area, plottolders have, each winter, taken it upon themselves to carry out a project aimed at improving the site's appearance and productivity. This winter, the work has included the erection of weathered chestnut paling fencing, provided by the HGS Trust, along two of the boundaries, coupled with the clearance of invasive growth. Nine enthusiastic horticulturists ensure the site is in full use. Photo Peter Hodgson

Jonathan Ross to judge at June 14 flower show

The Horticultural Society is delighted to announce that its President, Jonathan Ross, has once again agreed to judge the children's fancy dress and the adults' fancy hats competitions at the Summer Flower Show on Saturday 14 June at the Free Church Hall in Northway from 3-5.30pm. As well as the usual competitive classes for flowers,

fruit, vegetables and other home-grown produce, for the first time we will also include a table with home-made jam, marmalade and other preserves at the show for sale in aid of the North London Hospice.

AND LOTS MORE

But before that, there are many bargains to be found at the society's popular annual plant

sale on Saturday 17 May, 10.30am-12.00noon at Fellowship House, Willifield Way.

Wednesday 18 June is the closing date for entering your garden into this year's 'Suburb in Bloom' competition – first-timers very welcome.

Tickets are already selling fast for a coach trip to Bayford Gardens in Hertfordshire, where

many villagers open their gardens to the public, bands play and there are refreshments and local produce stalls - a lovely day out.

Details of how to join the society and enter all the competitions can be found on the website www.hortsoc.co.uk, as can the full details of the programme for the rest of the gardening year.

Open gardens on the Suburb

Now that there is truly a feeling of spring in the air and gardens are blooming, those who love to visit other people's gardens may like to take a note of the dates when gardens in Hampstead Garden Suburb will be open for

the charitable National Gardens Scheme (Yellow Book) on several Sundays in the next few months. Find details at www.ngs.org.uk or watch out for yellow posters advertising the openings nearer the time:

- 94 Oakwood Road, NW11 - 18 May (teas)
- 48 Erskine Hill , NW11- 8 June (teas)*
- 74 Willifield Way, NW11 - 15 June (teas)
- 5 Wildwood Rise, NW11 - 13 July (teas)
- 4 Asmuns Hill, NW11- 20 July*
- 86 Willifield Way, NW11 - 20 July (teas)*

*These gardens were visited in 2013 by HRH Prince Edward, Patron of the London Gardens' Society.

So, not as wet as all that then

There was much excitement in the news that the winter (the three months from November to January) had been the wettest since records began. This was asserted even before the last day's rain had fallen. As usual, these sensational commentaries ignored the fact that, not only is the rainfall in the various regions of the country very different, but these regions do not experience variations from normal in the same way. So the Suburb had a wet three winter months, but only the second wettest since 1980. There were 14 inches, compared with nearly 17 inches in 2002. The year 2000, with 13.68 inches, was not far behind. The 35 year average since

these records began was 8.68 inches compared with the thirty year average (normally used) of 8.94 inches. So it does look as if our winters may be getting wetter.

The six months from October to March were, again, above average, but not abnormally so. This was because March, with little over an inch of rain, was much drier than usual. The land could at last begin to dry out after the floods. As it has been mild as well as dry, the flowers (and the weeds) have put on tremendous shows and we can all cheer up with the appearance of the sun. Let's not think about the drought that is bound to come!

DIANA IWI

Welcome to St Jude's

Sundays:
8am Said Eucharist
10.30am Sung Eucharist
(Junior Church meeting in the Vicarage Rooms)
Thursdays:
10am Said Eucharist
All welcome!

Ascension: 10am Thursday 29 May
Whitsun: 10.30am Sunday 8 June
Proms Festival Eucharist:
Sunday 22 June
Celebrant and preacher:
The Bishop of Guyana



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