

December Newsletter



Potty for gift ideas

There's always plenty of choice for gardeners at Christmas time, especially when it comes to finding that special gift. We have plenty lined up for you at the Garden Centre, including zesty citrus, cheerful camellias (both are located alongside our cut Christmas trees) and the beautiful bay trees as well as our seasonally themed ready-planted pots located within our unique 'The Potting Bench' display area.



If you are looking for something perhaps more traditional to brighten your door entrance then how about Christmas box, *Sarcococca hookeriana*? This is a wonderful evergreen shrub (sweet and strong fragrance), which resembles traditional common box and is just as versatile in its usage. You can grow it as a potted shrub, it looks great in mixed plant displays, or even grow it as a dwarf hedge line, multi-tasking or what! You could also combine Christmas box with *Skimmia Rubella* with its wonderful red buds and contrasting deep evergreen foliage. The plants hold in tight bud until late February when the white flowers emerge, then you know spring is just around the corner!

We've also brought together a wide range of hollies for your consideration, including ball-shaped, pompon-pompon standard forms as well as more mature sized plants. All you need to complete your festive feast is a few well chosen ivies (*Hedera*).

Plant area's new look

We're looking proper posh in our plants sales area after a major re-vamp, re-build and tweaking of our shrub and herbaceous areas over the autumn period. Gone are the old benches and in their place are brand spanking new, purpose-built display plant beds giving extra height and convenience to your plant shopping. We continue to offer, and feel it is very important to feature, the A-Z displays of our favourite plants,



but we are catering for the impulse gardener as well by introducing plenty of display hot-spots to make your plant selection easier and, above all, fun.

We do thank you for your patience in view of the recent plant moves, but I'm sure you'll agree it's made a huge difference to your shopping accessibility. As well as having a bit of a move around (sorry for this but we thought now is the best time to do it so you will be used to it by the spring). We are also upgrading the plant information backboard labels giving concise information and, where possible, pictures of the plants as well. It's a gradual process but we are hoping to be complete by late winter.

Elsewhere, fuller information can now be found linking in with our mail-order catalogue, in the form of larger sized backboards, many with pictures and guides, covering the hedging and fruit areas. We know just how important good sound advice is, so the signs should provide the answer to many of the pushing questions concerning specific plants. Please, however, don't neglect the Plant Information Team - they are keen to give advice on all areas of plant care, plant selection and the gardening questions the signs simply cannot answer!



Spoilt for Choice

In early January shelves in the shop will once again be laden with 40 varieties of seed potatoes – yes, even more varieties than last year. As usual they will be sold loose so you can choose exactly how many potatoes you want. A few interesting varieties to mention:

Carlingford – round to oval, white skin, cream flesh, smooth skin, medium eye depth. 2nd early which is excellent for boiling or salads.

Charlotte – pale yellow skin, yellow flesh, firm texture. A real speciality salad variety.

Pink Fir Apple – late maturing distinctively shaped, excellent flavoured salad potato (winner

of the ugliest/funniest potato from last year's Potato Day!)

International Kidney – a classic of the English cuisine and the most important crop on Jersey, produced and sold as Jersey Royal. Heritage variety bred in 1879.

Nicola – long oval white potatoes, creamy- yellow flesh, wonderfully waxy. Excellent flavour, makes delicious warm potato salad.

Golden Wonder – dry, floury, rich flavour which improves with storage. One of the best varieties for roasting and frying. Brown russet skin and striking purple and yellow flowers. (Golden Wonder crisps are not made from Golden Wonder potatoes but from Lady Rosetta!)

Duke of York – firm early scraper which matures to a good all rounder. Pale yellow and slightly floury.

Typing these descriptions almost makes my mouth water, and certainly enthuses me to get planting next year as home grown spuds really do taste good – nothing like the bland, washed, supermarket type. Whilst on the subject of the humble spud, we will be celebrating its excellence again next year with 'Potato Day' over the week-end of 17/18th February. Colin Randel from Thompson & Morgan will be with us all week-end to give informal lectures, and to talk to any visitors. He is a real font of knowledge about vegetable growing and with his warm Devon accent is a joy to listen to, so make a note in your diary to come along.

For newcomers to potato growing we will also have ten of the top Thompson and Morgan varieties in 1 kg bags with full pictorial and planting information. Even if you have no room to grow your potatoes in soil in your garden the solution comes from Haxnicks who have produced new for this year a 'spud grow bag' which means you can grow your potatoes on your own patio. They come in a pack of three – one for the earlies, one for second earlies and one for main crop varieties – and cost £14.99. After you have harvested they can be washed and stored for use next year, or they could be used for carrots or many other vegetable crops.



Other vegetables you will find in the shop are a new shallot variety called Pikant, onion Hercules, asparagus, rhubarb, garlic and Jerusalem artichokes. Incidentally Jerusalem artichokes

(*helianthus tuberosus*) are not from Jerusalem nor are they a relation to globe artichokes! 'Jerusalem' is possibly a corruption of Italian girasole or sunflower which they are closely related to, hence the sunflower like flowers which appears in hot summers. The tasty nutty flavoured tubers were thought to have a similar taste to globe artichokes, hence its common name. They are also sometimes known as sweet potatoes possibly because back in the 1920s they were a commercial source of fructose.

Also in the shop you will find 72 varieties of dahlias from the classic deep red flowers and dark purple leaves of the popular Bishop of Llandaff to the more exotic Tsuki-Yori-No Shisha, a pure white cactus flower that can produce up to forty flowers per plant. Dahlias were named after the Swedish botanist Dr. Anders Dahl, a pupil of Linnaeus and the variety Bishop of Llandaff was raised by the Cardiff nurseryman Treseder in 1927/8 and named for Joshua Prichard Hughes, the 1920s Bishop of Llandaff. It was much used in parks and gardens before World War Two, then fell out of fashion, but in recent years its popularity has soared. It has been given an Award of Garden Merit by the RHS.

One more thing to look out for is the new Woodland/Wildflower Bulb Collection which includes ferns, trilliums, and old favourites like *Decentra cucullaria* (Dutchman's Breeches), *Belamcanda chinensis* (Leopard Flower or Blackberry Lily) and *Arisaema triphyllum* (Jack in the Pulpit).

Gardening Talks

Finally we are delighted to announce that we will be presenting a series of Gardening Talks next year. As we do not have a suitable lecture room here at the Garden Club, Buckingham Golf Club who are situated just over the road from us, are very kindly allowing us to use their room for the talks. They will be held there at 10.30 am on the second Wednesday of every month, the first date for your diary being January 10th when Chris Day will be giving a talk entitled 'This Gardening Business – a journey through 2000 years of gardening history, plants, fashions and fads.' Chris will talk for about one hour and obviously take questions afterwards. There will be a free raffle with a prize relating to Chris's talk. The raffle will be drawn back in the Garden Centre shop at 12.00. So all in all a good morning out, especially as you will get double discount on your loyalty card on that day.

The one down on this is that we have to limit the number of people who can come to 40, so please apply for a free seat, as soon as possible, via our web site www.hedging.co.uk/talks, telephone/fax or if you are in the shop apply at the customer service desk. The first 40 will be able to attend,

and we will keep a waiting list so if you are allocated a seat then find you cannot attend please let us know.

10 gardening tasks for December

1 CONTAINER MAKEOVER. Now is a good time, if you haven't already, to give your pots close to the front door or patio a festive makeover. There are plenty of seasonal plants available to achieve the yuletide look including red berried skimmias, gaultherias (pernettya), brightly variegated hollies (ilex) and Picea abies (Norway spruce), the traditional and best rooted Christmas tree available. Simply add red, gold or silver ribbon in the form of small individual bows or a huge one to the display to create the overall effect. Inexpensive low-voltage lights will add the finishing touch to your display. You could also leave a couple of spaces in your mixed displays to drop in pots of forced bulbs, such as hyacinths or narcissi, ideal to inject some welcome colour.

2 TIME TO CUT. Give the wisteria its winter prune now, cutting this year's growths back to 2-3 buds from the older wood. This will save time next summer. Vines need to be pruned during winter dormancy and should be completed before mid-January. When cut later in the season the rising sap will pour out of the cuts so weakening the vine. Cut bush roses down to half way to prevent them blowing in the wind and damaging the roots. The final pruning can be carried out in late February or early March.

3 BIG MOVES. December is a good time to move evergreens and large shrubs that have outgrown their current position. Try to lift them with as large a rootball as possible and tie them to stakes for extra stability.

4 CHRISTMAS TREE CARE. Place Christmas trees away from fireplaces, radiators, heat vents and anything else that could dry the needles. Keep your Christmas tree well watered from the time it is brought home until it is discarded. Always opt for a Christmas tree stand which has a good capacity water reservoir built into its design – it will save you time topping it up through the festivities.

5 CLEAN-UP. As cold nights bring the final leaves tumbling from the trees, rake lawns, sweep paths and patios, and pick up leaves from borders and rock gardens, where their soggy

mass can smother tender alpines, hardy cyclamen and late-flowering bedding displays. Leaves also provide shelter for slugs and snails, so clear them up without delay, taking care not to disturb any nesting hedgehogs.

6 BIRD WATCH. A few things you need to consider at this time of the year. Increase the supply of food, especially if it is cold or wet. Check for ice on the pond. Monitor the birds coming to your table – a great Christmas gift is a subscription to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). Remember to keep up your wild life diary and if you haven't started one, make it a New Year resolution!

7 UNDER GLASS. Lining the inside of your greenhouse with bubble wrap will keep it warmer and reduce energy costs if you're providing additional heat. Large sheets of white polystyrene can also be used to line the sides below staging level. Make sure you wash the glass inside and out before you start lining to maximise light levels. Remove any debris from guttering.

8 SOIL SCIENCE. Continue planting bare-root hedging, soft and top fruit whilst the soil and weather conditions are favourable. The current thinking is to make trenches wider (up to 90cm (3ft) across and a good spades depth (but no deeper than 60cm (2ft) and to improve the soil with generous amounts of garden compost, well-rotted manure or planting compost to encourage a much stronger fibrous root system. Combine this soil preparation with Rootgrow ® and your plants should get off to the best possible start.

9 IMPORTANT ROUTINE. Check fruits, vegetables, corms and tubers that you have in storage. Sort out any that show signs of disease and dispose of them. Take a look at the forced rhubarb, hopefully there will be signs of new growth.

10 LAST MINUTE. Get your tulips in this month. Can anyone have too many tulips? No, so long as you do not have them indiscriminately everywhere. But where you do have them, be generous, have lots. Plant them 15-20cm (6-7in) deep and they will go on for years. Remove mulches from around fruit to allow birds to eat over-wintering pests – make a diary note to replace with some new mulch before the end of February to help seal in some of the winter moisture.

BUCKINGHAM NURSERIES AND GARDEN CENTRE

Tingewick Road, Buckingham, MK18 4AE Tel 01280 822133, Fax 01280 815491
E-Mail: enquiries@hedging.co.uk Web: www.hedging.co.uk

WINTER OPENING HOURS

Monday-Saturday: 8:30am to 6:00pm, Sunday: 10:30am to 4:30pm (open 10am for viewing)

CHRISTMAS OPENING HOURS

Dec 24th: 10:30am-4:30pm, Dec 25th & 25th Closed, 27th to 31st Dec 9am-4:30pm, 1st Jan Closed