



# NEWSLETTER

## JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2013

### Out with the old and in with the new

I'm sure a great many of us will be pleased 2012 is now out of the way and we can look forward to a more productive, fruitful, and healthy 2013, says Chris Day. We often hear the term "the shoots of recovery", well in no other year I think this would be more appropriate after our gardens were hit by high rainfall on already sodden soil. All this occurred in the year a drought was declared and a hose-pipe ban was called, quite unbelievable if you think back on it. However, we gardeners are a tough breed and we need to look at this season with positive optimism.



So, what's on the horizon in 2013...? Well, the Royal Horticultural Society celebrates the centenary of their Great Spring Show in May, known to us as the Chelsea Flower Show. Expect some aptly themed gardens, and yes, Diarmuid Gavin is designing one, so there should be some fun in the show gardens too! Prince Harry's charity for HIV+ children in Lesotho, Sentabele, will exhibit at Chelsea in the show's centenary year. The Prince is said to be taking a "keen interest" in the garden, which is being designed by Jinny Blom.

It's at this time of the year we see all sorts of trends, fads and potential fashions for the upcoming season.



What we can say is that the movement to being wanted to be connected with nature is as strong as ever, together with the desire to grow more vegetables and fruits. The beneficial effects of gardening and working with plants are well documented and often include improving the mind, stress reduction and a lowering of blood pressure.

Oh, if only that were true I hear you say! For many of us, the simple connection with working with the soil, tending our young seedlings and the pleasure of harvesting a crop, however modest, is what gardening is all about. We can put all the right things in place, select the best variety or even provide useful preventative factors into our routine, yet Mother

Nature sometimes comes in at a tangent, and then the plan goes down the drain, literally as in 2012.

At least as we enter 2013, we are not in the grip of a drought as we were 12 months ago, however, the ensuing rainfall has certainly tested us, so let's hope we can put all that rubbish stuff behind us, especially those slugs and just get on with the garden in 2013. You never know, this year could be the best ever in our gardens!

### Join us for our spud fabulous Potato Weekend!

**Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> & Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> February (10am-4pm, both days).**

We celebrate all things potatoes with our Potato Guru, Thompson & Morgan's Colin Randel (pictured right), advice on growing all vegetables from the Bucks Branch of the National Vegetable Society, plus over 40 varieties of seed



potatoes for sale together with fruit grafting demonstrations with Fritz De Zutter (pictured left) and top seed advice from Kings Seeds' Jason Breed. Our weekend is pretty unique in that you can come along and meet and chat with real experts on all aspects of vegetable and fruit growing from the local area. There will be also a number of specialty food stalls as well as some delicious potato-themed dishes in the Restaurant.



If anyone has a fruit tree they wish to propagate from they are welcome to bring along some scion wood and this can be grafted onto an appropriate rootstock (we have a good range of rootstocks available for sale).

Colin, who introduced our customers to the versatile Oca in 2012, will be bringing along another vegetable gem, the Yacon, a relatively unknown root vegetable related to the dahlia.



This year we are also encouraging everyone to grow marrows by launching a competition open to everyone to grow the biggest, heaviest and weirdest looking marrow in 2013 courtesy of Kings Seeds. We'll have free seeds for you to take away over Potato Weekend together with some cultural instructions if you have never grown a marrow before. Again, we'll give all the schools that enter the Potato Challenge some seeds too so everyone can get growing.

Plus, over Potato Weekend we'll have the opportunity to buy seeds of the new Courgette 'Buckingham' (pictured right), which is being exclusively launched with us by Kings Seeds. Courgette 'Buckingham' is a F1 hybrid which produces compact plants forming highly attractive, yellow, thin-skinned courgettes with a delicate flavour.



Best of all you don't need acres of space to grow this variety as you can successfully grow it in containers and in planter style cropping bags, so it's a perfect candidate for balcony and patio areas everywhere! We are offering the seeds at a very special price of £1.60 a packet, so don't forget to grab a packet over the weekend. So you could come along to Buckingham Garden Centre that weekend and purchase Tayberry 'Buckingham' and Courgette 'Buckingham' and go home and grow them in a Buckingham (shire) garden!

**Calling all teachers!** Our School Potato Challenge 2013 will be launched over Potato Weekend. Please call in for your free Potato Challenge Pack from the 16<sup>th</sup> February onwards. Due to the widely reported seed potato shortage, we can only supply 6 potato tubers per school this year, but don't forget there will be marrow seeds available as well.

**Puzzle for spudding gardeners** A £2.00 donation, all of which will go to direct to [The Puzzle Centre](#), will secure you one main crop seed potato during Potato Weekend! Expensive seed but plant this is up in any container and bring it back for a fun 'weigh-in' on Apple Weekend (21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> September) and you will have a chance of winning a Garden Centre Gift Voucher worth £20 and a runners up prize of £10. If you don't win a prize you'll still have your crop of potatoes to eat and enjoy with the satisfaction that your money has gone to a very worthy cause.

### INSTORE OFFERS...

We all like a great deal, so when you next come and visit us look out for "Stella's Star Buy", "Abby's Amazing Deal", "Pat's Planted Promotion" (Pictured Patrick with his 3-litre blueberries, £14.99 each, or 2 for £20 offer) and "Peter's Mega Deal". We highlight these monthly offers regularly on Facebook [www.facebook.com/BuckinghamNurseries](http://www.facebook.com/BuckinghamNurseries) do check back regularly so you are kept up-to-date on what's on offer.

Coming soon to the Shop is a range of Imperial War Museum themed Denby printed tableware, including placemats, glass worktop savers, coasters and mugs.

The young plants (plug plant bedding and basket plants) season follows on quickly from our Potato Weekend this year, that's week commencing 18<sup>th</sup> February. There's good news too as we have managed to hold our prices on this range of plants for the third year running. The 4.6cm black net pots cost 99p each or 10 for £9.00, 6cm brown pots, £1.39 each or 6 for £7.50 and the 12-cell packs, £3.50 each or 4 for £12.



Finally, our summer bulbs and new season onion/garlic sets are now available. Amongst others we've a fantastic range of alliums, cannas and dahlias for planting over the next few months. Look out for instore deals and multi-buys on your next visit.

## Big Garden Birdwatch 2013

The RSPB's annual Big Garden Birdwatch is back on Saturday 26th and Sunday 27th January 2013, giving people across our patch of Buckinghamshire the chance to be part of the World's biggest wildlife survey. Almost 600,000 people across the UK took part in Big Garden Birdwatch in 2012 and between them counted more than 9 million birds.

To take part, people are asked to spend just one hour at any time over Big Garden Birdwatch weekend noting the highest number of each bird species seen in their gardens or local park at any one time. They then have three weeks to submit their results to the RSPB, either online at [www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch](http://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch) or in the post. Now in its 34th year, the survey provides the RSPB with an important snapshot of garden bird populations in winter and has helped to highlight some dramatic declines in UK garden birds.

In the first survey in 1979, an average of 15 starlings were seen per garden, but that fell to an average of just three starlings per garden in 2012, the lowest level ever. House sparrow numbers have fallen by two thirds over the lifetime of the survey too.

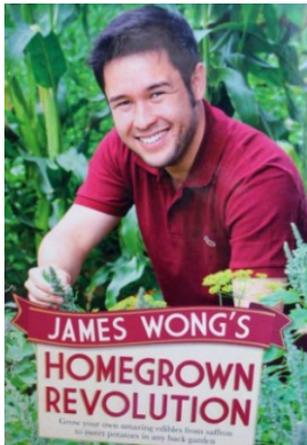
Sarah Houghton, RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch Manager, said; "Everyone who takes part in Big Garden Birdwatch is contributing to the World's biggest wildlife survey and helping us learn more about some of our most familiar garden birds.

The decline of birds like starlings and sparrows over the last 30 years or so has been alarming, but Big Garden Birdwatch has helped us find out more about their numbers and distribution across UK gardens, and that has been the first step in helping to put things right."

Some bird species have fared considerably better over the years. Sightings of popular species like blue tits, great tits and coal tits in gardens have increased since 1979. Goldfinches, which were absent from the Big Garden Birdwatch top 15 in the early years, have featured regularly as a top 15 species since 2004. To register, take part and to receive a free Big Garden Birdwatch 2013 pack go to [www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch](http://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch) or call the hotline on 0300 456 8330.



Long tailed tits on bird feeder; Photographer: Peter M Beesley, RSPB



**Win! We have TWO SIGNED COPIES of James Wong's 'Homegrown Revolution' up for grabs.**

If you would like to win a signed copy of James Wong's Homegrown Revolution (worth £20) then all you need to do is visit us over our Potato Weekend (16/17<sup>th</sup> February) and pop your name and address on the entry slips provided at the Customer Service Desk and we'll draw two names out of the box at the end of the weekend. Terms & Conditions apply.

### Jack Frost's Winter Wonders

Visitors to the pot grown plants area of the Garden Centre will often be greeted by the wonders of Jack Frost's artistry during the winter months. A recent shot of his works is illustrated here. However, beautiful his work may be, it can reap

havoc on plants that are in pots up on benches for the whole of the winter, as they are far more exposed to the elements than those with their roots in the ground.

The cold penetrates the compost in the pots from all sides. If the plant is in the ground a layer of frost or snow is above the roots and actually gives a degree of protection. If the cold persists for a long period the ground will eventually freeze, but this is usually a relatively slow process, so damage to the plant cells is less likely in hardy plants. The area of the plant above the ground is exposed but is lower down compared with plants on benches, so the force of the wind to the base of the plant is far less, so even if the upper area of the plant does get buffeted by the cold winds it is better able to cope.



For the last two winters we have suffered periods of severe cold which has led to the damage of many normally hardy plants, and the death of others which are considered marginal in their hardiness. For this reason we have reduced the quantity of plants in the selling area, which unfortunately makes the benches look rather empty. However, fear not, they will be brimming over with fresh stock once the danger of severe weather is over. If anyone is wanting any particular plants which are not on display in the meantime, please do not hesitate to pop into the Plant Information Office and let us know and we can see if we can procure the plants for you before the spring.

In the meantime the bare root stock of hedging plants, fruit trees, soft fruit and ornamental trees is heeled in the ground as usual and will be available until spring, unless of course the ground is frozen deeply then we will be unable to lift stock until the ground thaws out.

### Act fast for your bigger plants

A last call reminder for those customers looking for larger sized ball-rooted hedging and larger girth bare-rooted trees. We are able to source from European and UK growers for most sizes; however time is running out as the season comes to the end in March. It's worth remembering non-containerised trees are generally better value as they can be appreciably cheaper to buy than the potted equivalent. A good example is the popular tree *Amelanchier canadensis*, which in a 12-litre pot and standing 1.8m tall would cost £39.99. Compare this to a 6/8cm girth bare-rooted tree standing 2.5-3m tall with a clear stem of 150/175cm which would cost £35, a much larger tree for less money. The next size, an 8/10cm girth bare-root tree at 2.5-3m tall with a clear stem of 175/200cm would cost £65. The equivalent in a pot would be around £120! Clearly, larger plants do cost more; however some savvy planning can save you pounds in the long run. Come and talk to us at the Plant Info Office for the best options and prices.

*Image shows a deciduous tree being mechanically lifted as a bare-root tree prior to being heeled in on the nursery.*



### 10 tasks for January/February

**PREPARE** for the coldest couple of months of the year as temperatures plummet, so you'll need to protect the garden from frosts, gale-force winds and heavy rain. Check stakes, ties and fleeces (and fleece jackets) for damage and consider moving plants to sunnier positions to maximise light.



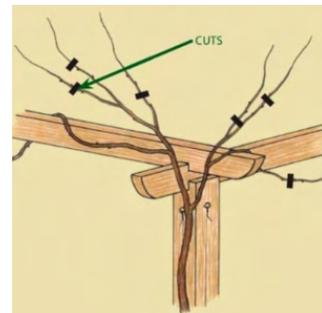
**LAWNS** Watch your lawn for signs of waterlogging, as the rain continues to cause serious issues. If you missed the opportunity to carry out autumn lawn maintenance, then you can still remedy the situation a bit, by spiking the lawn with a garden fork or mechanical aerator. Then fill the holes with a mixture of sharp sand and loam, brushed in using a stiff broom. However, only do this when a dry, milder interval of weather arrives. If the problems with excessive rain weren't enough, mole activity increases in January and February due to mating and nest building. If this is a problem, remove the largest hills and re-firm before overseeding in spring. If worm casts are an issue, brush them off regularly, again only do this when the lawn is reasonably dry and frost-free.

**UNDER GLASS** You can start sowing the seeds of Begonia, Lobelia, Pelargoniums and Salvia in a heated greenhouse or a windowsill propagator. Requiring less heat, sweet peas sown in the autumn can now be potted on. Set them on a sunny, but cool spot on a high shelf in the greenhouse which receives plenty of light. Forced bulbs will need more water as they develop and if they are to be brought into the house, again choose a well-lit, cool location so the flowers last well. You can bring in small potted shrubs such as Forsythia, Prunus cistena and Camellias to flower earlier if you want some forced early spring colour. Toward the end of February citrus trees in containers should be top-dressed with fresh citrus compost, and/or re-potted if necessary.



**DEADHEAD AND PRUNE** Many summer-flowering deciduous shrubs can be pruned between February and early March; usually those that flower on the current year's growth. Shrubs that need regular pruning include *Buddleja davidii*, summer flowering Clematis, *Ceratostigma*, *Hydrangea paniculata*, *Lavatera*, *Leycesteria*, *Perovskia*, hardy Fuchsias, and deciduous *Ceanothus*. However, delay pruning spring-flowering shrubs until immediately after flowering; otherwise this year's display will be lost!

Remember, too, mop-headed Hydrangeas flower on the previous year's wood and should be thinned by a third to encourage new wood. Hydrangeas can also be deadheaded late February by taking the flowering heads back to a strong pair of shoots. Finally, if you haven't pruned the grapevines, do so immediately, as they will bleed if left too late. Once you have a framework of primary limbs, prune laterals back to one or two buds. The same principle applies to Wisteria, by cutting back the side shoots shortened by summer pruning to two or three buds 2.5-5cm (1-2in). Complete any Wisteria pruning no later than the end of February (see diagram).



Avoid cutting off flower buds. Remove any reverted green shoots on hardy variegated evergreens to prevent reversion taking over and spoiling your plant. Cut out the top rosette of leaves from the leggy stems of Mahonia x media varieties such as 'Charity' to encourage branching from further down the plant.

**PROTECT** newly planted trees, hedges and shrubs from cold winds and frosts, which can loosen and lift the roots. Gently re-firm them in if you notice this problem, and erect a temporary netting windbreak if there is no natural shelter. Thick dry mulches will help protect the roots from cold, and branches can be covered with horticultural fleece, or even packed with dry straw and then covered with fleece, for tender plants. A wooden frame with clear polythene stretched over it does a similar job for evergreens without blocking out the light, but don't let the polythene touch the leaves, as condensation could freeze or cause disease to set in.



**TAKE** hardwood cuttings of ornamental shrubs such as Cornus, Escallonia, Forsythia, Rosa, Ribes and Salix. You can even take cuttings from Lonicera (honeysuckles) and Fallopia, the mile-a-minute vine, but only if you really want to! You can easily root these cuttings directly into compost too. Take your cuttings; around 6-9in (15-23cm) long and use a cut strip of old compost bag 12-15in (30-40cm wide) with fresh compost. Simply roll this in a Swiss roll manner. To secure the root area, place a couple of elastic bands around the bag to hold it firmly. Place outdoors in a sheltered protected corner of the garden, cold frame or unheated greenhouse. The hardwood cuttings should have rooted by late spring and then can be potted on into pots or simply planted directly in a border to grow on.

**NEW ROSES** Now is a perfect time to prepare a new rose bed, assuming soil and weather conditions will allow. As roses are greedy plants, a well-worked and fertile soil is essential. Traditional double digging was recommended in years gone by, but these days a single spade depth together with generous amounts of compost or well-rotted manure usually suffices. Lighter, sandy soils need further generous amounts of humus to help hold valuable moisture and nutrients. Work generous amounts of bonemeal and apply the friendly-fungi Rootgrow to each root as you plant. As we are in bare-root season, opt for root-wrapped roses where available as these are good value and there is good range available. However, bare-rooted hedging roses are also available, which offer even better value for money especially if you are buying a large quantity. Once you are in planting mode, remember to set the roses with the grafting point (the union of the rootstock and the graft of the variety) just below soil level. Some of the hedging roses are not grafted so this will not apply. Complete by applying mulch around each rose bush to help retain valuable moisture close to the plant and it will also suppress the growth of annual weeds.



**COOL-LOVING** houseplants such as Azaleas, Solanum and Cyclamen benefit from watering from below (in a saucer). Allow the plant to drink for half an hour, before pouring away the remaining water left in the saucer. If the level in the saucer does not go down, then the plant did not need a drink. You can always tip out the rootball and feel it before watering, to see if the compost is dry, or if it is still moist from previous watering. Use room temperature rainwater if possible.

Also when you have had a plant for a while you will be able to judge if it needs watering by its weight. There is a considerable difference to the weight wet or dry, and as soon as you lift the plant, assess its weight, and judge from that how much, if any, water the plant needs.

If your Christmas Amaryllis has finished blooming, do allow the flower stalk(s) to die down naturally. It is essential you keep the plant well feed and watered so it can produce some healthy foliage through the next few months. In July/August withhold watering and allow the bulb to wither back so it takes a rest before re-potting in fresh compost in the late autumn for a repeat flowering performance in the winter.

**PREPARE YOUR SPUDS** Onion sets and seed potatoes should also be purchased now (see Potato Weekend for full details). Remember the seed potatoes need to be kept in a cool, light environment while they are being "chitted". If you encourage growth too early, energy will be wasted and you will end up with withered tubers and leggy shoots. Set your seed potatoes in open trays under a glass roof in the garage or a similar position, where they are bright, cool and frost-free.



**TIGHTLY** formed evergreens such as conifers and topiary specimens (for example box and yew) are easily knocked out of shape by leaf litter blown in on the wind. Take a little time each week to check these plants and keep them free from harm. Other plants that may suffer are rosette type plants such as cordylines and yuccas where leaves tend to accumulate in the crown of the plant. These leaves will hold water and a frost will cause damage to the growing point of the plant which will rot and possibly die as a result. Snow will cause the same trouble to all these plants, so give them a gentle shake immediately after any snowfall. You might want to invest in some Plant Protection Guard & Fleece Jackets as well to help protect the plants from cold, drying winds and severe cold. These are available in two sizes; - 110cm high x 88cm wide, a pack of 3 costs £5.99 and the larger 198cm x 132cm, in packs of 2 for £5.99.



### **Our Verdict on Oca! Ornamental, delicious, easy, but not over-productive**

Back in February 2012 at our Potato Weekend, Colin Randel of Thompson and Morgan was here encouraging you to try growing a 'new' vegetable, Oca, *Oxalis tuberosa*. Many of you went away with a few tubers and we hope you have had success, writes Pauline Brown.

Personally I had never heard of them before then but a little research revealed that they have long been a staple food grown in the high Andes and they were at one point grown in Europe and eaten as a substitute for potatoes.

As they are not prone to blight like potatoes, and although an oxalis some of which can be invasive this one is not so, it seemed a good idea to see what success one had growing them. They certainly looked interesting and the Thompson and Morgan trials had proved they would grow in this country. Here at the Garden Centre many

of us love vegetables so we decided to have a go at growing some Oca. Like anything new we wanted to grow them in as many ways as possible to see which (if any!) would be successful. So we planted some direct into the ground in May, started some off in small pots in the greenhouse and when they were well rooted in and the weather was warmer and frost free, planted them out into the vegetable garden, planted some in compost in medium size pots and kept them in the pots feeding and watering them as necessary and finally one in a large pot in which it was grown for the whole season.

All grew well producing a good mound of attractive shamrock-like small leaves some of which were suffused with purple, and despite some sources saying that neither the red or yellow coloured tubers bear any flowers, our plants grown from pink tubers did produce some very small yellow flowers, albeit nothing to write home about! They certainly are an attractive enough plant to be put in ornamental containers or amongst shrubs in a sunny border if you are short of space in your vegetable plot.

Having enjoyed the plants during the summer they were all left until the frost had truly destroyed the top foliage and they were lifted in the first week of December allowing the maximum growing time as the tubers apparently do not really start to develop until late autumn. The results were truly variable. The star performer was the tuber in the large pot which produced 0.92Kg of good sized tubers. The crop produced from this plant are the tubers in the photograph. Those left in the smaller pots produced smaller tubers and far less. Those planted into the ground having first been started in pots produced only about 0.5Kg per plant of smaller, but none the less edible tubers, but considering the general quality of root crops from the garden this year, this was most likely the weather causing the lack of yield.

The only two which produced very little were those planted in May direct into the garden, but again this was almost certainly due to the weather, so a further trial will have to be carried out next year when hopefully we will have a better summer.

When it comes to cooking and eating one would wonder if they would be difficult to clean but, possibly due to their very shiny surface, the soil brushed off very easily with a small brush. They are tasty and crunchy if eaten raw with a salad giving a good lemony zing. What we completely forgot to do was to harvest a small number of leaves during summer to add to salads as these supposedly have an appetizing lemony tang. The

tubers can be boiled but as they lose their vibrant colour and, I would guess, some of the goodness (they are rich in carbohydrates, calcium and iron) into the water I would favour roasting them the following way. After scrubbing clean, shake off surplus water, then put them in a low Pyrex or roasting dish and drizzle with Cotswold Gold Extra Virgin Rapeseed Oil, a local product which is excellent for cooking. Make sure all the surfaces of the tubers are covered with the oil, then sprinkle with a little rock or natural sea salt, and pop in the oven at 200° for about 20 minutes until just beginning to go soft. Take from the oven and drizzle with a little honey, toss around to make sure all are coated, then pop back in the oven for about 5 minutes, keeping an eye on them as you do not want the honey to burn. We were delighted to be able to use honey from our bees at the Garden Centre. Prepared like this we found delicious, with the tangy lemony flavour of the flesh contrasting with the sweetness of the honey. If this is too much of a fiddle, simply roasted in butter is simplicity itself and results in a tasty vegetable to accompany many a meal.

Our verdict is that they are well worth growing and hopefully with more favourable conditions next year we will get much better results from those grown direct in the garden. The tubers will be available for sale again at Potato Weekend on 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> February and after until stocks last.



Our Garden Talks programme commences on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> February from 4:30-5:30pm with Gerald Sinclair, who we are delighted to welcome back with his talk on Hardy Geraniums.

On Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> March we welcome John Gibson and his aptly timed presentation on Growing & Showing Daffodils and on 10<sup>th</sup> April, Malcolm Beerman is our expert speaker on The Care & Cultivation of Fuchsias.

All talks are free to Garden Club Members, £3 for non-members. Booking is essential, please contact the Customer Service Team to book your place on 01280 822133. We hold our Talks in the Restaurant Talks Area from 4:30pm and they last around 60 minutes.

In 2013 we are also planning at least three garden visits, including Highgrove. Details and prices for Highgrove will be announced as soon as a date for us is released. The other two will depend on numbers, so please express your interest at the Customer Service Desk if you would like to join us for the following: -

**Malvern Spring Gardening Show** Friday 10<sup>th</sup> May 2013. Cost £45.

**Buckingham Palace State Rooms & Garden Highlights Tour** on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> August 2013. Cost £50.

Finally, don't forget the "Snowdrop Days" at **Evenley Wood Gardens** are over the following weekends 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup> February from 11am-5pm. For full details check out their website [www.evenleywoodgarden.co.uk](http://www.evenleywoodgarden.co.uk)



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### WINTER OPENING HOURS:

Mon.-Sat: 8:30am-5.30pm, Sun: 10am-4pm