

# Newsletter January 2008

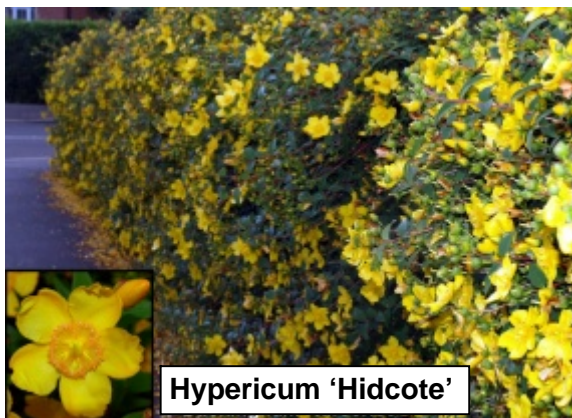


As we write this Newsletter the temperature outside is well below freezing and the ground is so solid that we have not been able to lift any bare root plants from the ground for several days. It seems amazing to us that customers are still coming in expecting to collect plants – in fact one got quite cross with a member of our staff when she said she could not lift the plants he wanted! These conditions remind us of the early the days of the business here at the Buckingham site in the 1970s when regularly in January we had days if not weeks of similar temperatures, generally accompanied by heavy snow. Staff had to be sent home as we ran out of work that could be done. History could well be repeating itself if conditions do not warm up soon, but if we can believe the long term forecast relief should be with us in a few days and in the meantime our despatch staff will be tidying up every corner of the despatch building and turning their hands to re-organising the shop displays and other such work!



## Winter Action Plan

With confidence that the weather man will be right and we will be able to get out into the garden again soon here are a few timely tips. Firstly, do we need to remind you again that this is the time to plant bare root hedges? We have in stock thousands of bare root plants at the moment heeled in to the beds just waiting to be collected and put in their final positions to form beautiful hedges in gardens, stock proof hedges round fields or amenity hedges in public places. With so many varieties listed year after year it is sometimes difficult to find really exciting new lines to introduce, but this year we think we have come up with a real gem in Photinia fraseri 'Little Red Robin'. We guess most of you are now familiar with [Photinia fraseri 'Red Robin'](#), a spectacular evergreen with glossy, dark-green, leathery leaves and brilliant red new growth. The main flush of red is in the spring; then throughout the growing season there are further bursts of colour. [Little Red Robin](#) has all the attributes of 'Red Robin' but with all the features in perfect dwarf proportion thus making a charming hedge of only 2-3ft (60-90cm) in height. Like most hedging plants it will also make a beautiful shrub, in this case with an ultimate size of 3ft by 3ft (1m x 1m).



Into the hedging range we have also introduced a common shrub [Hypericum 'Hidcote'](#) which actually makes a colourful semi-evergreen hedge of three to four foot high. If they are planted 18 inches (45cm) apart they make a good hedge, which is truly spectacular between July and October when it will be covered with 2 inch wide, showy, saucer-shaped, bright yellow flowers with prominent darker yellow stamens.

If you have a new garden to plant, or gaps in your garden which need filling in the most economical way it is well worth considering planting the 'hedging' size plants listed in the catalogue as these are far cheaper than the normal size of plants offered in two or three litre pots. For example Hypericum 'Hidcote' would normally cost about £7, whereas the 'hedging' size costs only £2.35 if collected from the Garden Centre, or £2.49 if sent on our mail order service. If you also invest in some Rootgrow the younger plants will grow really rapidly – a useful tip in these times when we need to watch what we are spending.

Another thought for potential saving of money is finding space for some [soft fruit](#) or [fruit trees](#). For instance a maiden [apple](#) or [pear](#) tree would initially cost £13.95, a bush tree £17.50 or a half standard £19.99. With the cost of apples being approximately £1.50 to £2.50 a kilo, it will not take many years to be 'in profit' from a tree, and what can be better than harvesting your own fruit. An apple picked on a warm summer day and eaten straight away tastes as nectar from heaven!

Also, even the smallest of gardens has the potential of producing a harvest of vegetables. Any gaps between shrubs or perennials can be filled with colourful vegetables such as red leaved lettuce, radicchio or beetroot. Many crops, such as [potatoes](#) or carrots, can be grown in bags on the patio; hanging baskets can be filled with [strawberries](#) or [cranberries](#), and ornamental pots with [blueberries](#). There are endless possibilities. If you want more ideas just pop into the plant information office and they will be more than happy to give advice.

If you already have a crown of mature rhubarb in your garden it could be that it is in need of lifting and dividing to keep it really productive. Have a good look at the crown now there is no foliage cover, and if the centre of the crown is beginning to look non-productive you would be wise to carefully lift the crown and divide it. If you do not need extra plants find a friend who has space for some? After replanting in well prepared and manured or fertilised ground, do not pull from the crown for at least one year or if possible two years, as this will give the crown time to establish. Because of this resting period it is better, if you have space, to have at least two crowns; then if you do not lift and replant them both in the same year you will always have a mature crown to harvest from.



It is also time to take root cuttings from herbaceous perennials. We would recommend buying fresh rooting hormone even if you have some left from last year. This may seem wasteful but unfortunately it does lose its efficacy with time and temperature so to be sure of really good results with your cuttings the investment will be worth while.

If you do already have fruit trees or soft fruit in your garden or on your allotment now is the time to prune them to get the best yield possible. If you are not sure how to prune your plants there are some good books available on the subject, many of which are available on loan from your local library, or just pop in and ask for advice from our plant team. Any large wounds made when pruning should be sealed with Arbrex Seal 'n Heal or use Maxicrop's Pruning Balm, based on growth stimulating seaweed extract. Also having pruned the trees fit grease bands on the stem to control winter moth caterpillars. A word of warning though - do not prune stone fruit (plums etc.) now as these should be pruned in the summer to eliminate the danger of silver leaf attacking the tree through the wounds.

With pest and diseases in mind think back to last summer and if your yew, Leylandii or other conifers suffered from brown patches they were most likely being attacked by aphids. To try to stop this happening again it is a good idea to treat the plants with Growing Success Winter Wash. For best results make sure you get right into the centre of the plants with the wash as well as treating the outer parts of the plant. You must still keep an eye on the plants in the summer to make sure they are not still affected and re-spray with an appropriate summer spray if necessary, but hopefully the Winter Wash will solve the problem.

If you are fortunate enough to have a greenhouse in your garden, it is important to think about the ventilation at this time of the year as making sure the air is changed regularly helps to avoid botrytis. Also if you are using a gas or an oil heater in the greenhouse a change of air with ventilation is needed for proper combustion and will avoid a build up of exhaust gases which can damage the foliage of plants. Even in a cold spell of weather, when the sun shines in the day it is surprising how warm it gets in a greenhouse, so opening the door or ventilators when the sun is out will not cause the plants to suffer from the cold - but do not forget to close up at night.

Another job to be done now is to dust stored dahlia tubers with yellow sulphur. This will not take long but it will mean you will have good healthy tubers ready to plant out when danger of frost is past. Another job to do now in preparation for better weather is to get your broad beans planted in deep pots so they are ready to plant out as early as practical. You may have sown some outside in autumn, but with the weather as it is you may need to replace them this year. A good variety to sow now is 'The Sutton'. It is always a good feeling to start preparations for this year's harvest and, even with this cold spell, it would be possible to get out and lime the ground where brassicas, or spring planted wallflowers are to be planted. The more you can do now the less of a rush it will be when the really busy spring time comes.

If, when you look out in your garden, there appears to be no colour or interest it would be worth considering planting some of the many plants that give winter interest. [Chaenomeles \(flowering quince\)](#) with many different coloured flowers from palest pink to vivid oranges, winter jasmine with its bright, star-shaped yellow flowers, Sarcococa with its tiny heavily scented white flowers peeping out of the glossy dark green evergreen foliage or Hamamelis (witch

hazel) with its spidery yellow or orange flowers, [Lonicera fragrantissima \(winter honeysuckle\)](#) to name but a few. Come and wander round the Garden Centre and you will be amazed how much colour there is at this time of year.



One thing gardeners with plants with colourful berries will have noticed is that the birds have by now stripped off most, if not all, of the berries for food. Blackbirds will often guard a particular bush from other birds but not eat the berries. However, when a cold spell comes they will then start to feed on their 'stored larder of food' and when this has gone they will be hungry. In general birds need extra food to keep their heat level high enough to survive so please feed your garden birds. They are your helpmates in the summer eating caterpillars, aphids, slugs etc. so it is worth helping them now, and what pleasure it is watching their antics around the bird feeders, tables and on the ground. If you have apples which you have stored, do check through them and if any are getting a little soft and not so good for you to use, please put them out for the birds – blackbirds, thrushes, redwings and fieldfares will consume them with gusto.

Unfortunately the grey squirrels also love to come and take the birds' food, but we have a new feeder which enables you to feed the birds and not the squirrels. This is called a 'Squirrel Buster' bird feeder which has an ingenious spring system which, when a squirrel lands on the feeder, the outside of the feeder lowers over the feeding holes preventing the squirrel from getting at the food. A bird does not activate this mechanism as it is much lighter than a squirrel. At £19.95 it is not cheap, but it does mean that the food goes to the birds as intended.

Another new line is the ring pull, easy clean feeders which have been recommended by the wild life expert and TV presenter Simon King. It is a well known fact that bird feeders should be kept clean so that birds do not pick up diseases from the feeding stations. With many feeders this is difficult to do properly, but these ring pull feeders are really simple to take apart and re-assemble so cleaning is not a chore any longer. Again a 'luxury' product at £17.95, but they are not only easy to clean but also extremely robust and will, therefore, last for many years.

Feeding our feathered friends is very popular now, so designers are coming up with many good new ideas. One of these is the new wrap around hooks which simply twist round one inch poles making hanging feeders so simple – no messing about with nuts and bolts. They come in two lengths and are good value at either £3.95 or £4.95.

If you want to make sure that the money you spend is fairly distributed, then you will be pleased to know you can now purchase Fairtrade Peanuts. A fair share of the money from these nuts will go to the growers and they really will

get a just reward for their work. Also, as value for your money we now have available seed and insect or berry suet treat in 3 KG economy tubs at only £9.99. By buying these instead of the smaller packs you can either spend the same amount and let the birds have more food, or keep them on their present rations and pay less.

Finally when thinking of birds we now have in stock the 'no-net' fat balls which are recommended by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. If you do have fat balls with nets, please remove the nets before putting them out as birds have been known to get the claws of the feet tangled up in the nets with dire consequences. Wire mesh feeders are available for both sizes of ball so you do not need to hang the balls from the nets.

## Spuds 'r' Us

When you come into the shop you will see that spring is on its way as the [seed potatoes](#) are out for sale. We have 17 varieties of First Earlies, 14 of Second Earlies and 15 of Main Crop, all loose so you can choose exactly how many you want, or you can buy full sacks. Varieties newly stocked this year are 'Anya', 'Edzell Blue', 'Lady Christl', 'Osprey' and 'Yukon Gold'. Prices are geared to the quantity you buy, with the highest price for up to 2 Kg, a lower price from 2 Kg to 6 Kg, and an even lower price for more than 6 Kg. 25 Kg or 20 Kg sacks are the most economical method of purchasing if you need a large quantity. It is a good idea to come and buy early as some varieties are in shorter supply and may run out earlier than others. We also have in stock [10 varieties of pre-packed potatoes](#), which when packed weighed 1 Kg. These are more expensive than the loose potatoes but are an easy, convenient way to buy your seed potatoes and are available through our [mail-order](#) service. If you are a novice at growing potatoes there is a [cultural instructions](#) sheet available for your guidance.



## Plant Area collects 'Highly Commended' at Industry Awards



We don't rest on our laurels at Buckingham Garden Centre and these last few months have been industrious in ensuring our plant area is kept spic and span for the start of the new season. As many of you may know, we entered the prestigious Garden Retail awards last year and we are delighted to announce that we scooped a Highly Commended for our plant area. This is a huge tribute to the Plant Team, Plant Buyers and Nursery Staff that diligently covered all the bases with our presentation incorporating our on-going commitment to plant range, plant quality, display and care of our diverse and wide range of hardy and seasonal plants. We beat off stiff competition in the final line-up and we are delighted with the result.

## **Carol Goes All Fruity**

After the incredible success of Carol Klein's Grow Your Own Veg last year TV series and selling a staggering 300,000 copies of the same-titled book, Carol will be back on our screens soon with her new series, Grow Your Own Fruit. The Royal Horticultural Society team of experts and Carol will guide you through the growing of 40 different fruits, from crunchy flavoursome apples and pears, to the appetizing soft fruits of blueberries and Goji berries to the more exotic mouth-watering citrus, figs and olives!

The timing of this new book and TV series is perfect as we are midway through the bare-rooted season, which means much better value plants are available when it comes to establishing new stock. We have an extensive range of maiden top fruit stock, plus where available larger bush and half-standard trees for quicker results.

Where space is limited, we also carry fan-trained, espalier and dwarf growing fruit as well, so this means walls (provided they are south or west-facing) can be productive as well as decorative. Reasonably sized pots are also useful for cropping fruit (think blueberries) as these can be moved around and positioned where necessary for best growing conditions.

## **Make a date in your diary - Potato and Apple Weekend**

Talking of potatoes we have a really exciting week-end planned for the 7th/8th February this being named 'Apples of Earth and Air'. First we will be having for the third year the now popular Potato Week-end when Colin Randel from seed merchants Thompson and Morgan, will be with us all week-end. All who know Colin will be aware that he is very good at talking to customers about potato growing or, for that matter, any other vegetable growing. Colin will not be giving formal talks as he finds that customers much prefer to talk to him one to one, and others will be listening and sometimes joining in as well. In this way a wealth of knowledge is exchanged. Alongside Colin we will also have Bernard Stopps, a local expert on potato growing and showing. Colin and Bernard make a very good 'double act' and both seem to enjoy the week-end as much as the customers.

Alongside this we will be running, what we believe may be the first APPLE SCION SWAPPING WEEKEND to be held in this country. Scion wood swapping has been popular in America for a while and as we feel this will be a good way to help preserve excellent, little grown varieties of apples we decided to run a scion swapping week-end here.

If we have lost you, a brief explanation follows. Varieties of apple trees need to be propagated by grafting, as they do not come true from seed and do not grow satisfactorily on their own roots if grown from cuttings. A 'scion', which is a shoot containing buds, is removed from the tree to be propagated and grafted onto a 'root stock'. The root stock is a young apple tree of a type particularly suited for this purpose, which will support good healthy growth in the scion and produce a suitable size tree. Most of the top growth of the new

tree will be derived from the scion. Just the roots and a short section of trunk will be derived from the root stock.

We will have the two founding members of the Mid-Shires Orchard Group with us all week-end giving talks about preserving interesting old varieties, how to graft trees, and the work of other Orchard Groups. We hope to have over a hundred different varieties of scion wood for people to swap with interesting varieties they have. We will be grafting the scion wood for customers so they can buy a very reasonably priced tree. We will also have our 31 varieties of bare root maiden and bush apple trees available plus lots of other top and soft fruit.

There are so many English apple varieties which offer wonderful and varying flavours and these are not available to the public to buy as fruit because they are not grown commercially, and, therefore, do not get into supermarkets or even greengrocers. Occasionally one can find them at farmers' markets. A lot more seems to be happening to make the 'general public' aware of the demise of the English Apple, and we, like the members of the Mid-Shires Orchard group and other orchard groups, are passionate to save as many varieties as possible, then persuade people that it is easy and so rewarding to 'grow your own'. During last summer we demonstrated this by having a series of very small show gardens from which we produced good supplies of healthy, organic fruit and vegetables. We also constructed some raised beds from pallets to show that you do not need a garden but just an outside space in order to grow a little. We had many enquiries about buying the containers, so we gave out instructions of how to construct them with very little cost.

Sarah Juniper, who many of you have met at our Apple Day events, hopes to be with us for the week-end as well, so any questions on Apples will not go unanswered. If we are really busy with grafting, Sarah's skills will be used as well.

As well as the basic Apple and Potato event we will have cookery demonstrations with Ali Templeton basing her cooking on delicious apple and potato recipes. Ali, authoress of the 'Going Green' cookery book, a book full of recipes with big flavours without meat, has been with us many times and is always popular with her audiences – especially when they get a chance to sample the dishes!

This is definitely a date to put in your diary – let's hope the sun will shine on us to make it a perfect gardeners' event.

### **Don't miss out on... plant area early-bird offers**

**Buy 2 Get 1 free offer** on selected shrub and perennial lines: these young liner plants, in small pots, are perfect for potting on and growing this spring. They offer a great way of stocking a new bed or border on a budget and they are reasonably priced at £3.45 each.

**Potted bulbs** including Narcissi 'Tete-a-Tete', iris, crocus and tulips are now in stock and already pushing through with the promise of spring just around the corner. Priced at £1.65 for 9cm pots and £2.93 for 1-litre pots these make great gap-fillers for pots and borders.

**Root-wrapped roses.** This year we've selected a cracking range of hybrid tea, floribunda, miniature, patio, climbers and rambler roses for your selection. Sensibly priced A1-grade plants at £5.99 each.

### **What else is going on...**

February's garden talk (Wednesday 11th Feb, bookable through our customer service desk and the venue is now at the garden centre) will be 'Growing Under Cover', presented by our very own Chris Day. Whether you are growing plants under cloches, cold frame, polytunnel, greenhouse or conservatory, timely seasonal advice will be on offer.

You can also catch Chris on BBC Three Counties Radio on the following dates: Saturday 24th January, Saturday 8th February and Saturday 22nd February. The programme, The Greenhouse, is broadcast between 11am-2pm and is a mix of gardening, diy, cookery and lifestyle.

One further thought whilst this cold weather persists. If you have a pond in your garden it is very important to have at least one area free of ice to enable toxic gases to escape. It is very important not to do this by breaking the ice with force as this could stun the fish. There are several recommended ways of clearing a space in the ice, the easiest of which is to use a pond heater if you have an electric supply within ten metres of the pond. The Aqua El pond heater will cost £39.95 for the 150 watt model or £44.95 for the 300 watt model. You can put a saucepan of hot water on the ice and this will slowly melt the ice, but be careful you do not lose the saucepan! You can pour boiling water over a small area away from fish and plants, or in milder cold spells a ball floated on the water can keep an area clear, but if the cold gets too intense this will not work.

Three of our customers were delighted to be the winners of our aquatics prizes at Christmas time. One had a marine tank set-up, another a tropical tank set up and a third a selection of pond goods. To inspire our customers we have just re-done our marine display fish tank, so do come in and have a look at this and other display tanks in the Aquatics area – at least it is always warm in that area of the shop!

## **BUCKINGHAM NURSERIES AND GARDEN CENTRE**

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### **WINTER OPENING HOURS**

Monday-Saturday: 8:30am to 5.30pm,  
Sunday: 10:00am to 4:00pm (open 9:45am for viewing)