

# NEWSLETTER

## March 2010



### Tatty Ho!

A really big thank you to all of you who supported our Potato & Apple Scion weekend and made it such a great success, writes Chris Day. We had a great line up of vegetable, apple and potato experts, including Colin Randel from Thompson & Morgan, the Midlands Orchard Group for apple grafting, as well as the local branch of the National Vegetable Society. There were lots of your queries answered and large numbers gathered to watch the apple tree grafting.

We have had plenty of interest in our Potato School Challenge, launched over this special weekend. This is a challenge for the children to grow the greatest total weight of potatoes in six bags. Alli Templeton's cookery demo on Sunday proved a great success with the crowds and the samples tasted delicious!

Finally, the best decorated potato competition for the children (pictured) proved hugely popular, with 20 entries.

### Winner of Garden Club competition:

Well done to Ben Taylor from Tring, who won a hamper of Potato Goodies at our Potato & Apple Scion weekend in February.



### Edibles of the future?

We are all aware the sterling work carried out by the Heritage Seed Library at Garden Organic at Ryton Gardens, so we were very interested to hear of a new development, called The Exotic Seeds Collection Project. Basically, the aim is to collect many non-traditional edible plants which have rarely, if ever, been commercially sold in this country. They may have come in with immigrant communities or have been handed down the generations or be obtained from neighbours or friends or from fellow allotment holders.



Hamburg Parsley

Garden Organic are aiming to try and save unusual or little known crops such as Hamburg parsley (a tasty variety brought to our attention last year at our November Garden Talk by Darren Bullock, Head Gardener from the Claydon Gardens Estate), chick peas, white maize, yard-long beans; the list is long! Sally Cunningham, one of the co-ordinators of the project, would really like to hear from you if you are interested in getting involved. She is especially keen that we gardeners tell as many people as possible who grow vegetables about the project. Also the project would like to know if you grow something which might come into the range of plants that they cover or if you know someone who does. The ultimate aim will be to allow gardeners to use this diverse seed source and grow many of these seeds in their own garden, especially



important in view of climate change, food security and protecting valuable crops for future generations.

If you would like to take part in the Exotic Seeds Project, please contact Sally Cunningham at The Exotic Seeds Collection Project, Garden Organic, Ryton Gardens, Coventry CV8 3LG. Tel: 024 7630 3517, e-mail: [scunningham@gardenorganic.org.uk](mailto:scunningham@gardenorganic.org.uk)



### Plant of the month: Hebe

Hebes provide a wealth of colour from their flowers or evergreen foliage, and we'll have plenty of them to select from throughout the rest of the year. There are plenty to tempt you, including the recently introduced 'Heartbreaker', the tough 'Pagei' and the robust 'Lady Ann' (pictured). Do please have a look at our wide range of varieties and remember that many of the hebes can be grown on the patio in pots as well as in the open border.

### Spring into Action!

Don't you just love this time of the year - the anticipation of hosts of glorious yellow daffodils, the burgeoning tree blossom, and the sights and smells of Mother Nature stirring from her winter slumber?

With Mother's Day around the corner we have a fantastic range of indoor plants, including



orchids and beautifully created planted arrangements. We offer the complete gift wrap service, whatever the size and shape of your gift: please ask for details.

Running up to Easter and continuing to the theme of containers, check out our new range of Polka Dot planters displayed on The Potting Bench. They are certainly different and they will catch your eye, that's guaranteed!



## Hellebore Heaven

Our next talk: Just to remind you our next Wednesday Talk will be on the April 14<sup>th</sup> between 10.30am -12noon and the gardening topic will be 'Hellebores: The botany of these star performers and how to choose, grow and propagate them', with gardening writer and speaker Andrew Mikolajski. Seating is limited, so please book early through our Customer Service Desk either in person or by telephone on 01280 822133.

## Hillhout clearance

We have limited lines of Hillhout timber products – fencing panels, trellis and posts – to clear at 50% off marked prices. All Hillhout products are pressure treated and come with a 10-year guarantee. Lines are strictly limited, so if you need to replace a panel of fencing, put up a new fence or erect some trellis then you might be able to bag a bargain!



## Aquatics update



Pictured is one of our marine sales tanks, and we would like to emphasize that our tanks are not simply display tanks as we make every attempt to keep all our marine livestock in the best surroundings possible and as near to your home aquarium conditions as we can. You will not find cramped bare tanks anywhere in our shop, just suitable marine environments for all our fish and invertebrates.

We stock a wide range of varieties of both fish and

invertebrates from many areas of the world and often including some of the more sought after Australian Stony Corals.

We are happy to cater for everyone from the complete novice all the way through to the advanced marine reef keeper, and all of our staff have extensive knowledge of marine fish and reef keeping. Whether you're coming to the shop or just ringing us for some advice we are always happy to assist and help in any way we can.

Our ethos, as far as possible, is to ensure the preservation of all the aquatic life that we sell, with a strong emphasis on careful advice so that you enjoy this great hobby, and your livestock flourishes.

If you are planning to re-vamp or re-plant your outdoor pond, it's still a bit too early to establish new plants, but as we head into April a good range of plants will become available, including water lilies and that will be an ideal time to plant.

## Lawn Revival and Survival

Is it too early to fire up the mower? Well, Chris Day thinks not, but you've got to get to grips with some essential spring care first after a prolonged cold winter. A quick view over the lawn can be depressing at this time of the year. Bald patches, yellowing turf, rough edges, it's nearly enough to install that decking you've been promising yourself.

But stop, don't deck, simply spend some time and effort revitalizing the lawn with the following treatments.

**1<sup>st</sup> step MOW** Wait until the weather has been kind and has been dry for a day or two. Set your mower on its highest setting, so you remove just the tips of the grass. The 'little and often' approach to mowing will always give you the best results over the season. You can drop the mower height as the spring progresses. Avoid mowing if a frost is forecast for the following night.

**2<sup>nd</sup> step SPIKING (AERATION)** You can do it the hard way using a garden fork (no fun believe me!) or you can opt for a spiking machine, which you can buy or hire. Aeration is essential to open up your lawn and allow more air down into the root system. Best of all it relieves compaction from wear and tear or the weight of lying snow.

**3<sup>rd</sup> step SCARIFYING (RAKING)** Your lawn holds masses of dead grass, roots and moss which, if left, increases the stress around your lawn's own root system. This needs to be removed by using a spring tine or scarifying rake and vigorously raking through the sward. You can opt for an electric scarifier; again these can be bought or hired.

**4<sup>th</sup> step LAWN TOP-DRESSING** You might have to resort to applying this if your lawn has become uneven, as top dressing will effectively even out any low dips in the lawn. Allow 1-3kg per square metre of the dressing to make amends and you will need to brush this in to create new levels. The other beneficial effect of top-dressing is that it improves the drainage of your lawn.

**5<sup>th</sup> step FEEDING** A good spring feed will help stimulate the roots and encourage strong leaf growth across the lawn. Choose Scots Lawn Builder, Evergreen Cut & Feed or Evergreen Organic Choice Lawn Food as these can be applied by hand or spreader and depending on what brand you use, it might be advisable to repeat the feed again six weeks later as this will encourage strong and healthy plants.

**6<sup>th</sup> step BROADLEAF WEED CONTROL** If you are plagued with clover, creeping buttercup, daisy, dandelion, plantain and dock, then a suitable selective weed killer may well be the answer. Verdone Extra is an excellent choice, but it can be applied only once per season. If some weeds persist you can re-treat with Bayer Advanced Lawn Weedkiller or a feed, weed and mosskiller such as Evergreen Complete as these contain different chemicals. Lawn weedkillers are only effective from April onwards when the weeds are growing actively. The odd clump-forming weed could also be removed with a knife or mechanical weeder.

**7<sup>th</sup> step MOSS CONTROL** (see below)

**8<sup>th</sup> step UNWANTED WEED GRASSES** The only practical way, if your lawn is overrun with weed grasses, is to kill off the area with Glyphosate and then re-seed the area after a few months. Mowing the lawn regularly discourages their return.

**9<sup>th</sup> step OVERSEEDING** If an area of the lawn is bare or has been stripped of moss and is therefore gappy it can be overseeded with some grass seed. Lawns with a thinning sward might also benefit from this process.

**10<sup>th</sup> step TIDY THE EDGES** By simply keeping the lawn edges tidy you'll find that the whole lawn always looks better.

## **Wholly mosses!**

We have reached the time of the year when people start to panic about moss in lawns. In fact the problem will abate once the weather warms up and the grass starts to grow strongly again, but the lawn can look a mess in the meantime if left untreated. However, care needs to be taken as some products can do more harm than good if applied too early, as quick release nitrogen feed can cause a surge of soft growth in mild spells, which is often damaged by frost and leads to disease. The only chemical treatment for moss in lawns is Sulphate of Iron (Ferrous Sulphate), which is available in a number of products, including those listed below. As always we strongly recommend you follow the pack instructions before applying.

## What's available.....

**GREENUP MOSSFREE** is straight Ferrous Sulphate, which can be dissolved in water and watered on in all but the wintriest of conditions.

**LAWN BUILDER LAWN FOOD PLUS MOSS CONTROL** contains Ferrous Sulphate plus a spring and summer fertiliser in a granular form. The fertiliser is slow release and can be used from March onwards. Unfortunately this product is not compatible with the cheap Evergreen Easy Spreader that we sell. It needs to be applied by hand or with an EvenGreen or other adjustable spreader.

**EVERGREEN AUTUMN** contains Ferrous Sulphate plus a low nitrogen fertiliser. This is not slow release but should be alright for use from March onwards. Evergreen Autumn can be applied using an Evergreen Easy Spreader.

**LAWN SAND AND EVERGREEN COMPLETE** contain quick release high nitrogen fertiliser and should not be applied until April.

### Guess the flower !



Just for fun - answer in next month's newsletter.

## 10 Tasks for March

**PRUNING TIMES** Prune shrub roses down to between 10-15cm (4-6inches) above the ground, and dispose of the pruned branches. Prune them short, since all sorts of disease spores can survive on the branches. Only retain strong shoots and only prune when there is no frost. Prune to just above outward-pointing buds. Climbing roses need attention too. If they are already sizable bushes, you should prune off a few of the oldest branches. Cut the others back if they have got too long as this encourages the formation of fresh shoots. Leave the rest. Branches which are bent horizontally to some extent give the most flowering shoots, which is why the fan shape is particularly popular when training climbing roses. **PRUNE HEATHERS** Trim back the shoots with dead flower heads, and make the plants into a spherical shape. However, never cut back to the bare wood, since the plants will find it difficult to re-grow from that wood.

**WATER SAVINGS** In view of the possibility of some water companies charging more for summer water, now would be a good time to consider installing a water butt, even if you have one or more already. Butts can be linked

together easily with kits sold in the shop.

**VEG SOWINGS** You can now start sowing directly into the soil the likes of broad beans, parsnips, onions and peas. If you have cloche, cold frame, unheated greenhouse or porch, sow summer cabbage (go for varieties such 'Greyhound', 'Hispi' and 'Stonehead'), radish, lettuce, rocket, spinach and early turnips. You can sow them directly into individual cell-trays so avoiding root disturbance later on. Don't forget to keep chitting your potato tubers.

**REMOVE WINTER PROTECTION** Remove protective layers of organic material from perennials. Ensure that you do not damage any young shoot tips. Take care not to walk on areas where there are bulbs in the soil. Remove fleece or other winter protection from the crown of standard roses, cordylines and other tender plants.

**COMBAT SLUGS** Get in early before slug and snail numbers explode with the warmer weather. Slugs are mainly nocturnal. You can catch them by hand during their night-time feeding expeditions. Many people are reluctant to use slug pellets because of worries about the safety of children, pets and wildlife and general environmental concerns. However, all garden chemicals are subject to stringent control by the government and should be safe if used according to the instructions. Do not put the slug pellets in heaps, always scatter them



thinly and store the pellets out of reach of pets and children, as you would with any other poisonous substance, such as bleach or meths.

The least poisonous, and the least effective, are aluminium sulphate based products such as Doff Slug Attack, but even so, aluminium sulphate can be harmful in large quantities as was shown when it was accidentally added to the water supply in Camelford. The most poisonous, but the most effective are methaldehyde based products such as Doff Slugoids. A good compromise is Growing Success Advanced Slug Killer. This contains ferric phosphate, which is poisonous, but is approved for organic use as it is naturally occurring. An advantage is that the slugs crawl into the ground or to a secluded place to die, so there are no slime trails or corpses to gather up. There is no evidence that birds or other wildlife can ingest harmful quantities of poison by eating dead slugs.

An alternative to slug pellets is to form a barrier round vulnerable plants which the slugs cannot cross using Slug Defence Gel or Slug Stoppa Granules or for plants in pots Slug Stoppa Tape.

**UNDER COVER** Wash down the greenhouse roof and sides to remove grime; this also applies to cold frames and rigid/glass cloches. Before any seed sowings, clean and sterilise pots and trays. Help to warm soil outdoors by covering the soil with black plastic sheeting a week before sowing (opened up bin bags work well),.

**PROTECT** blooms on early flowering fruit trees – apricots, nectarines and peaches – with horticultural fleece or a similar material. Remember camellias in pots need to be positioned so they receive sunlight from mid-morning onwards, otherwise any vulnerable buds may get frost scorched, go brown and fail to open.

**CHECK** for bugs, especially aphids, as soon as the warmer, drier days commence. Emerging perennials and overwintered greenhouse plants need to be sprayed with Provada Ultimate Bug Killer before numbers increase and damage is done. This highly effective insecticide can be used on a wide range of ornamental and edible plants, but please read the instructions before use.

**PLANT SUMMER BULBS**, corms, rhizomes and tubers such as agapanthus, tuberous begonias, callas, cannas, dahlias, gladioli lilies and tigridia. As tuberous begonias, cannas, dahlias and tigridia are frost tender these will need to either be planted in pots in a frost free place or protected from frost if planted in the ground.

**SPRING CLEAN** The improving weather means finally we can do some serious spring cleaning – clear away winter debris, fallen leaves etc through the borders and around plants, tidy stems that were missed in the autumn, remove weeds and prepare the soil around plants for feeding and mulching. Use Vitax Q4 fertiliser for spring and summer flowering shrubs, roses and herbaceous perennials. This is a good blend of the main nutrients nitrogen, phosphorous and potash and it also contains a range of trace elements – minor nutrients that can make a major difference. Power wash drives, paved areas and patios to clear away algae and moss or treat with Patio Magic. Make sure the area around emerging spring bulbs is tidied – clear debris and mulch if required.

## **Buckingham Nurseries & Garden Centre**

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**OPENING HOURS:** Mon.-Sat.: 8:30am to 5.30pm (**6pm after 22<sup>nd</sup> March**),  
Sun.: 10:00am to 4:00pm