

NEWSLETTER

LATE JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2011



Let's Roast, Boil, Mash & Chip! Celebrate Potato Weekend 12th & 13th February, 10am-4pm each day, Free Entry!



Let's hope the weather is kind for our Annual Potato Weekend over the weekend of the 12th & 13th February. We have a great line-up once again this year... Thompson & Morgan's potato and vegetable expert, Colin Randel and local allotmenteer Bernard Stopps, plus demonstrations of APPLE SCION GRAFTING with Fritz De Zutter from Moulton College. We'll also have members of The National Vegetable Society Bucks District Association on hand to give advice, plus much, much more.

For local schools, we are launching our popular School Potato Challenge and new for 2011, The Scarecrow Competition. Full details and entry forms will be available over the weekend. We look forward to seeing you at this popular event!



Step back in garden time...

On the turn of the New Year most people tend to look forward with thoughts of what the New Year will bring, but I like to be different and look back and on doing so have come across a few little facts which I thought I would share with you, writes Pauline Brown. Were you aware that there was an 'Apple Day' held in Aylesbury in 1829? This event which was held on 5th October was the last in the calendar of shows listed by the Aylesbury Florist and Horticultural Society.

They also had listed Apples for their Show on the 20th April, along with Auriculas, Polyanthus and Cucumbers. Shows for the



remainder of the year seem more seasonal as May has Tulips and Anemones, June Ranunculuses (pictured), Pinks and Strawberries and August Carnations, Picotees, Melons, Currants, Gooseberries and Raspberries. Even here Gooseberries and Currants seem a little late for August. Lists of this type make one think back to the conditions people were gardening in and what equipment they had available and wonder who was actually producing the plants and fruit for these shows.

Seed merchants, such as Suttons (pictured, their original HQ in Reading), were trading back in those days and it is interesting to note that it is not only the number of vegetable varieties available from seed catalogues has decreased quite dramatically over the years but also flower seed varieties. Looking back to see what was available in 1892 and comparing this with the 2010 listing, some interesting facts come to light. Looking at Suttons' listings and taking four commonly grown varieties, in 1892 13 varieties of campanula were listed yet by 2010 this has reduced to 5 (which is up on 2005 when there were only 2!), helichrysum again there were 13 in 1892 yet only 1 in 2010, in 1895 there were 7 cineraria and only 4 now and 8 gaillardia and now only 3. Both of the last two have crept up from 2 and 1 in 2005, so maybe this is showing a new trend.

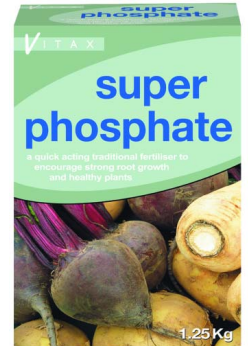


An advertisement in 1889 for 'Tennis Lawn Mowers' lists widths from 6 inches to 14 inches, with widths in between of 7, 8, 10 and 12 inches. I know they had larger families in those days, so maybe the narrow versions were for the different ages of

children to cope with whilst 'helping' father in the garden. However at a cost of 23/- for the 6 inch wide mower this would have made it an expensive 'toy'!

In an August 1889 edition of Amateur Gardening magazine an article appeared which would raise very different reactions from many readers of today, some applauding its bluntness and other the opposite. There are some very clear drawings showing how to cut tin strips to make some very sharp animal deterrents with the wording alongside 'The anti-cat contrivance was just one way to trying to combat one of the most reviled pests of the garden'. Have opinions changed over this matter?!

And one final bit of gardening history – how many folks local to Buckingham were aware that near the end of the canal in Buckingham an enterprising business man set up a factory to manufacture Superphosphate (pictured typically how we purchase it today), which was eagerly purchased by local farmers and gardeners? There was always a surplus of bones available from London in the days of horse drawn vehicles, and these were easily transported by barge on the canal to Buckingham. However, maybe we should start to look forward now to when and to what you should be applying superphosphate to your garden this year, even if it has come from a little further away than Buckingham Town.



Spring forward... to new trends in 2011

So, what's going to be popular in Garden Centres in 2011? We gardeners love to predict trends, fashions and fads, but this year as the Grow Your Own movement continues, just look at how many people grew potatoes for the first time last year? Well, fruit in all its guises is certainly showing positive trends, from top fruit and selecting plants for wall or fence training, to the delicious soft fruits of raspberries (autumn-cropping types), strawberries and blackberries, guaranteed to produce a small crop in their first year of planting.



The gardening trade is also pushing Cut Your Own Flowers this season, again on the back of austerity and the fact that cut-flowers such as dahlias, roses and gladioli are now back in vogue. But here's something to consider before planting those plump tubers, corms and root-wrapped roses... it is the location that needs to be sunny and the soil reasonably well-prepared, well-worked rather than over rich in nutrients. Once planted, normally in late spring, just keep them well-watered, staked if the plant grows tall and a little liquid feed, a tomato fertiliser is best, to encourage those plants to bud up then give spectacular results when in flower.

During the dull days of winter it is always good to have some fresh flowers in the house and it should now possible to find out where they have been grown before deciding whether to buy them. However, if you have Dogwood growing in your garden, you do not need to buy flowers as a really vibrant arrangement can be made by cutting the colourful stems from Dogwood and making an arrangement of these.

The variety ['Midwinter Fire'](#) is particularly effective with its twiggy multi-coloured stems, but the straighter single coloured stems of, for instance, [Cornus alba 'Kesselringii'](#) (Black-stemmed Dogwood), [Cornus alba 'Spaethii'](#) (Golden-Variiegated Dogwood), [Cornus alba 'Sibirica'](#) (Red-stemmed Dogwood) or [Cornus sericea 'Flaviramea'](#) (Yellow-stemmed Dogwood). If you arrange the stems in a vase of water they will last for weeks, in fact until the catkins of Hazel appear then these could also be added to the vase. A really environmentally friendly way to cheer up your house.

We've all of these forms available bare-root at the moment, so if you have some spare spaces to fill, this would be a savvy way of producing stem colour for next winter for just a few pounds!

Oh, and few more plants to whet your appetite which will be appearing over the next couple of months... 2011 Rose of the Year, Rosa 'Joie de Vivre' (PBR), delicately perfumed buff pink blooms, bred by top rose breeder, Kordes. £12.99 in 5-litre pots.

A new evergreen Magnolia called 'Galli Goliath' sounds exciting. Basically a compact form of grandifolia with large white goblet flowers, 20-30cm (9-12in) in diameter on robust plants that flower at an early age. £39.99 in 5-litre pots. Magnolia 'Black Tulip' is also back, a fantastic colour with a compact habit. Available in a 5-litre pot at £39.99 (limited availability).

A further batch of plant newbies!

Six new ornamental shrubs have been introduced to our Catalogue range of plants, writes Pauline Brown – [Hydrangea paniculata 'Pinky-Winky'](#), [Japanese Maple, Dissectum 'Emerald Lace'](#), Mexican Orange Blossoms, ['Goldfingers'](#) and ['White Dazzler'](#), [Physocarpus opulifolius 'Diable D'Or'](#) (pictured) and [Variegated Mock Orange](#).

The Japanese Maple was chosen as it is more heat and sun tolerant than many acers so the beautiful foliage is less prone to leaf burn. The two Mexican Orange Blossoms are choice varieties, one with beautiful golden foliage and the other with even better flowering capacity than the common Mexican Orange Blossom.



The Physocarpus has an awful name but is well worth growing with its rich purple foliage and contrasting flowers. The Hydrangea (pictured) has unusual shaped blossoms which are bi-colour, pink and white, and grow steadily throughout the season ending up some 12 inches (30cm) long.



Finally the Variegated Mock Orange has beautiful variegated silver and green leaves and the wonderfully perfumed flowers so admired on the Mock Orange family.

The ground cover plant [Lesser Periwinkle 'Illumination'](#) is a truly eye-catching variety with really bright golden leaves with green margins and pink tinted stems. It is excellent for brightening up dull shady areas, and has the added bonus of pale lavender-blue flowers.

New climbers have been added, ['Scentsation' Honeysuckle](#) (pictured), and [Purple-Leaved Vine](#). 'Scentsation' produces an intoxicating fragrance from its ivory to creamy-yellow flowers from mid-spring to late summer. The Purple-Leaved Vine has intense claret-red foliage all summer turning rich purple before falling, and has the added bonus of bunches of small, purple, edible grapes.



More Multi-buys!

This year we will be introducing more offers and multi-buys on a wide range of plants and products, thus helping you save more money and offer even better value!

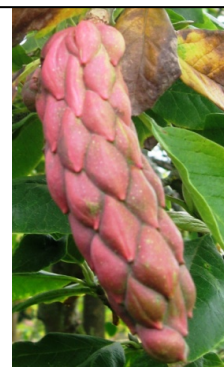
Look out for our 3 for £10 on a wide range of 1-litre Potted Spring Bulbs (normally £3.49 each), Primroses Mixed (10.5cm pots) Buy 10 Get 1 free! and [Root-Wrapped Roses](#) Buy 6 and receive the cheapest Rose free. Finally, we've four varieties of 3-litre Blueberries ('Berkeley', 'Bluecrop', 'Goldtraube' and 'Jersey', pictured with Plant Area Manager Mike Easom) on offer. They are normally £14.99 each, now 2 for £20 (saving £9.98)!



Did you guess correctly?

Picture puzzler: We hope you solved the plant identification in our last newsletter (pictured to the right); the answer is the seedhead of *Magnolia x soulangeana* photographed at Sissinghurst Castle Gardens.

This month's teaser – just for fun – this seedhead belongs to which popular bi-annual plant group, but which one? Answer in our next newsletter.



Re-development update



Our Garden Centre Re-Development work continues... the final stages of the first phase of the new shop are being completed now, hopefully this will be fitted out and ready to go towards the end of February.

The new section for the restaurant is under construction, looking like a large Meccano kit, this new structure will see the joining of the new roof with the existing one, over the following weeks.

In view of the on-going work, you may find re-directions in place and changes to customer flow when you next shop and sometimes have to endure noisy machinery. We do thank you for your patience and understanding whilst these essential works continue.



Catch Chris on BBC Three Counties Radio!

BGC's Chris Day is one of the line up of gardeners appearing with presenter (and keen gardener) Ernie Almond on the new Gardening Phone-in, between 3-4pm on Sunday afternoons. To find out when Chris is next on, please check the Buckingham Garden Centre Facebook page as details have yet to be confirmed.

Garden gossip...

Have you caught up with Carol Klein's new series (Friday's on BBC2, 8.30-9pm)? Life in a Cottage Garden, filmed in Carol's Devon Garden at Glebe Cottage, charts the life of her cottage garden over a year. You can watch the programmes again on the BBC iPlayer.

Monty Don returns to our screens in March to front BBC2's 'Gardeners' World'. The new 'home' of 'GW' will be his



Herefordshire garden where he will be joined by co-presenters, Rachel de Thame, Carol Klein and Joe Swift.

Also on our TV screens, Monty Don journeys from the south of Italy to the north, visiting some of the country's most beautiful, impressive and interesting gardens along the way in Monty Don's 'Italian Gardens'. From lovingly-created romantic hiding places to enormous formal gardens of the Catholic Church, this four-part series, to be shown in March, is bursting with great characters, compelling stories and captivating insights.

Gardening Tasks for late January/February

SEED SOWING will be happening in earnest over the next few months, so you need to be prepared now. Make sure all seed trays, seed tray inners, 'plug trays', plastic plant pots, pot tray carriers (or shuttle trays) and the area housing your potting bench and greenhouse staging, are thoroughly washed down with a mild disinfectant such as Jeyes Fluid.

Once treated, allow to dry off naturally before storing everything in readiness for use. Elsewhere, start warming prepared beds. Cloches and black plastic sheeting are best at warming, whilst keeping the soil dry, making a big difference to early spring sowings (pictured). Old carpets, hessian and horticultural fleece also help to warm soil, but don't keep it dry. Beware of slugs!



PRUNING: Complete apple and pear winter pruning. Remember you are aiming to produce an open, goblet-like shape to the fruit tree framework, so allowing good air circulation which will help reduce disease and make for better ripening and easier fruit harvesting.

If not already done, prune autumn fruiting raspberries, reducing them back to 6in (15cm) as they fruit on new growth produced this spring and early summer. Summer fruiting raspberry canes, that is new canes that didn't crop last year, need to be spaced and tied in.

WEEDING POTS: Hairy bittercress can be a curse in pots as it can quickly establish itself if not removed. You do need to be quick to remove this weed as it will rapidly flower and set further seed, so ensuring continued persistence in your pots, borders or, worse still, the lawn, where it can be a really tricky weed to eradicate!

Back to the pots, consider removing a 1-2in (2.5-5cm) layer of the old compost and add some new multi-purpose compost as a 'top-dressing'. This smartens the appearance, removes any weeds and mosses and provides some welcome new compost and nutrients to the existing plants in the container.

NEW HEDGES: The cold snap of December delayed many hedge planting schemes, so now it's time to catch up. You need to work with the weather, so be prepared and get the area cleared of weed giving a 90cm (3ft) wide strip for planting. Normally working the soil to a single spade depth and two spades wide is sufficient. Add generous amounts of compost and well-rotted manure to the soil. Don't forget to treat the roots of newly planted hedging with [RootGrow](#) to help boost healthy growth, and to add [Broadleaf P4](#) to aid the water supply to the plants.

SPUDS TO START: The process of 'chitting' [seed potatoes](#) can start now as you need to encourage good, strong growth. Stand the tubers upright (as pictured in egg boxes) and wait for strong, short green shoots to appear, about 1.5-2.5cm (3/4in-1in) long, from the eyes of each tuber. You don't want the white, spaghetti-like things you get when potatoes are kept in the dark, but stout green and pink shoots. A cool, well-lit location is essential for this type of growth. To maximise the size of your potatoes, rub off all but three or



four shoots at the top of the tuber before planting out early in the spring.

LAWNS: Get your lawn mower and other tools overhauled and/or sharpened, if you still haven't done this. Continue to improve the drainage by spiking if water is settling on the lawn after heavy rain or thawed snow. Don't walk on the lawn, or allow your dogs or children to do so, if it is very wet or frozen. Check your lawn for moss, and if we have a mild spell, continue to rake out any dead moss. If necessary apply a moss killer with a weed and feed formulation on poor lawns.

INDOOR PLANTS: Control small flies (fungus gnats) in houseplant compost by placing a Agralan Mini-Yellow 'Sticky' Trap amongst your foliage plants. The flying gnats will fly and attach themselves to the surface and come to a sticky end!.

Continue to feed citrus plants with your Vitax Citrus Winter Feed, applying fortnightly. Mist spray foliage plants with a hand sprayer containing tepid water, preferably rain water to prevent a build-up of lime on the leaves. Do this once or twice a week to help discourage red spider mite.

WINTER DAMAGE: Remove any snow-damaged branches from shrubs and small trees, cutting cleanly back to a healthy branch or the trunk. Gardeners often try to get partly broken branches to heal by strapping them back together, but they are highly unlikely to rejoin and may attract fungal problems. Wound paints are not recommended on older damaged wood, although Maxicrop Pruning Balm may help stimulate new growth along the younger stems.



PREPARE FOR SUMMER: No sooner than the spring bulbs decide to pop their leaves tentatively through the cold soil, we now need to think about those glorious summer bulbs and get them sourced and planted. It's still a tad early for Begonias and Dahlias, although they can be started off under warm glass if that's available, however, the likes of Anemone De Caen, Lilliums such as 'Star Gazer' (perfect for pots, pictured), Freesia and Gladiolus can be planted next month onwards in well-prepared soil.

VEG TO SOW NOW: If you have somewhere sheltered you can sow Beetroot, Rocket, Broad Beans, Summer and Autumn Cabbage, Cauliflowers, Bunching and Spring Onions, Leeks, Carrots, Kales, Peas, Shallots and Radish. Under glass and heat: sow Leeks, Onions, Celeriac, Globe Artichokes and Broccoli. This is also a good time to prepare new Asparagus beds – pre-pack roots and small potted plants will be available shortly.



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