

NEWSLETTER

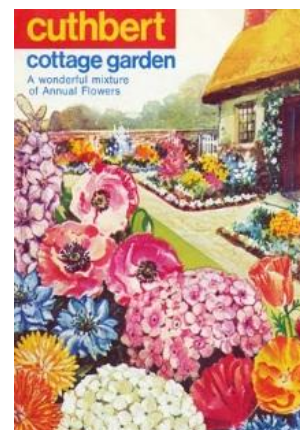
MARCH APRIL 2012



Queen's Diamond Jubilee: Gardening 60 Years On...

In the year of The Queen's Diamond Jubilee, *Chris Day* takes a nostalgic trip down memory lane to see what we were up to in our gardens back in 1952! No, I'm not getting into a DeLorean and travelling Back to the Future (or should that BE Back To The Fuchsia!), more of a taster of what we were doing in our gardens and of the social events at the time.

So, what plants were we buying for our gardens in the 1950s? Well, garden centres were yet to be invented, however, nurseries and mail-order companies thrived through this period. Fryer's Roses, Bees of Chester (plants & seeds), Cuthbert's Seeds (Woolworth's own brand), and Carter's Seeds are perhaps the ones we remember most.



For your gardening fix, *Amateur Gardening* and the RHS *The Garden* were popular reads. Top selling plants of the time included Hostas, Roses, rockery plants, Monkey Puzzle Tree, garden pinks, Dahlias, Hollyhocks, Chrysanthemums and vegetable varieties. Popular hedging plants of the time included Cotoneaster simonsii, Spotted Laurel, (Aucuba japonica), Hollies (Ilex), Privet (Ligustrum) and Red Western Cedar (Thuja) amongst others. Sixty years on and these remain as popular today.

Many gardens – wholly or part – had given over space to self-sufficiency and *Dig For Victory* in the decade before, so gardens and gardeners were able to shape their gardens again and that included the lawn. In fact, it was this decade that us Brits fell in love with our lawns and our obsession on growing them to perfection. To keep your grass perfectly trimmed and neatly striped, well there was only one real option, the push mower!

Now, what was it about this little machine – the effortless movement, the sound or the spray of lawn cuttings that used to go everywhere? As gardening memorabilia goes, this is a classic. I remember seeing at least two in my dad's shed, rusted to bits, they would need constant oiling. Yet, they cut through the sward with ease – even if the grass was wet – to perfection. The downside, mis-calculations on turning sometimes resulted in some ill-timed mass dead-heading and any low branches/large leaves were taken out. Best of all, using a push mower was probably the best physical workout anyone would need, unless of course you were a hay fever sufferer! You can still buy them for around £50!



If you went to the nursery to buy your bedding plants – Marigold, Salvias and Lobelia – were the top sellers – the process would be as follows; you would select your plants, which would be growing in shallow wooden trays, the assistant would then lift the plants out of the tray and using a long sharp knife, not too dissimilar to a bread knife, carefully slice through the loam-based compost cutting off the number you required and then these would be neatly placed on to some newspaper to pack them for your return home. The wooden slatted trays would then be recycled and used for the next crop. Goodness, how times have changed – even in the last 30 years we have seen polystyrene; three-section strip bedding, full and half-trays in plastic and today we use modular cell-packs made from recycled plastic!

We had to wait nearly 40 years before *Ground Force* hit our screens, but in the meantime we had to make do with just two programmes. BBC Radio 4's *Gardeners' Question Time*



went national in 1957 some 10 years from being launched as *How Does Your Garden Grow?* In 1950, and then for 30 years, the half-hour programme was chaired by Professor Alan Gammell with regulars Fred Loads and Bill Sowerbutts. Over the year some 3,000 gardening questions have been answered. Gardening audiences have been as diverse as Leyhill Open Prison, the Palace of Westminster and a nudist club in Wales! We had to wait until

1968 before *Gardeners' World* appeared in black and white on our TV screens. Now we enjoy it in magnificent high definition.

Some major events of the 1950's The Peak District is designated Britain's first national park; Zebra Crossing introduced; Snowdonia designated a National Park (1951); Elizabeth II becomes Queen (Feb 6th 1952); first British Record Chart Published; Hillary climbs Everest; Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on 2nd June 1953; Roger Bannister runs the four minute mile; Launch of ITV; first Birds Eye Fishfingers go on sale; Panorama Spaghetti Hoax; first Edition of Blue Peter; Donald Campbell breaks water speed record; postcodes introduced and in late November 1959 the M1 motorway opens.

We'd love to hear your gardening recollections of 1952 for our next newsletter (May-June edition), so drop us a line at the address at the end of the newsletter or e-mail chris@hedging.co.uk

Love potatoes, love our weekend!

Despite the chilly weekend, our 5th Potato Weekend was busy with customers enjoying the advice from Colin Randel, Potato, Seed & Vegetable expert from Thompson & Morgan Seeds, Kings Seeds' Jason Breed and members of the National Vegetable Society (Bucks Branch) headed by John Branham. Members of the Tingewick and Water Stratford



Horticultural Society provided plenty of delicious foodie samples with some lovely curries, including a potato one, prepared by Naina. Many of you came along to watch as well as have a go at apple grafting with Fritz De Zutter from Moulton College. His enthusiasm for the subject, his clear instruction and attention for detail knows no bounds! Here are a few pictures of the weekend and you can see more on Facebook www.facebook.com/BuckinghamNurseries

You are going to like this, quite a lot! Magician Phil Banks entertained throughout the weekend and is pictured here conjuring up a few tricks with one of our young customers, Johnny Brown (pictured left).



Colin Randel (pictured right) top Potato, Seed and Vegetable expert from Thompson & Morgan answered questions on all aspects of potato culture and variety selection.

Fritz De Zutter (left) from Moulton College drew in the crowds as he demonstrated the art of apple grafting.



Oca what?

We launched a *new* vegetable, Oca (pictured), at Potato Weekend, and judging by the sales of the tubers and the comments we received, you seem to have given it a thumbs up! We have produced an information leaflet about the tuber, its origins, culture advice and harvesting, so please do ask for details when you next visit us. Thompson & Morgan, the



company responsible for releasing this new addition, have been trialling it for the past two years. Packs of 5 tubers cost £4.99 and the plants need to be started off on a windowsill or a greenhouse before planting out in May. Availability is limited.

What's new? A couple of products to help your garden flourish!

Vitax Q4+ is designed to be used in the same way as the original all purpose fertiliser Q4, which we have been selling for many years now. Vitax Q4+ has the added benefit of mycorrhizal fungi, helpful bacteria and a range of bio stimulants to encourage root growth and help plants establish. This new formulation can be used as a pre-planting fertiliser (so no different to traditional Vitax Q4) or you can use it as a compost base dressing. See pack for further details. What we think: For convenience, this new product makes the application of friendly-fungi around root zone extremely easy. Although slightly more expensive than Vitax Q4, the extra ingredients make it good value overall. Price: 900g, £5.99.



You may remember a product called Tumbleweed Gel weedkiller a few years ago which allowed you to spot treat weeds amongst plants in borders, lawns, in bases of hedges, in vegetable patches, flower pots, and in other awkward places without getting weedkiller onto plants that you wanted to keep and where only a touch of weedkiller was required on each offending weed.

Well, Tumbleweed Gel, which was Glyphosate in gel form, is back but in a very different format as **Roundup Weedkiller Gel**. At first glance it looks like something you would use to apply as an underarm deodorant as the applicator is based on a similar design. However, this new weeding tool is both precise and controlled allowing you to treat weeds around the garden with a single application.

It works systemically so ensures that it kills the roots and therefore the weeds don't come back, and it is, therefore, perfect for the likes of bindweed! What we think: A clever design, certainly easier than mixing up and applying with a paintbrush; however the Roundup Weedkiller Gel isn't cheap. Having said that, it will go a long way and makes spot weed treatment a doddle! Price: 150ml, £8.99.

10 Gardening Tasks for March-April

1. **NOW** the soil is beginning to warm up we can start thinking about planting the likes of Asparagus Crowns, Shallots, Onion sets, Jerusalem Artichokes, Ginger, Horseradish, Early Potatoes and Rhubarb crowns. You can warm up the soil further by laying some polythene or landscape fabric 7-10 days before the intended planting date. These crops need a weed-free location generally in good, direct light in well-prepared soil. Early chitted Potatoes can be planted out from late March onwards. Traditionally Good Friday is when we would plant out our spuds and as Easter falls early this year, there's no excuse!
2. **PROTECT** new spring shoots (such as Delphiniums, Hostas and Lupins as well as emerging vegetable seedlings) from slugs and snails. Many people grow their Hostas in pots to help reduce slug damage, so to reduce any attack you can use a band of Fito Copper Tape and run this around the top rim of the pot. If you have a collection of Hosta pots or Tulips in pots do leave sufficient space between the pots as slugs have a tendency of leapfrogging across leaves and stems, albeit slowly!! As far as chemical control, Slug Clear Liquid is a good choice on ornamental plants as it works by killing those slugs living below the surface of the soil before they have a chance to damage precious plants. It is best applied when warm damp conditions favour slug activity.



If using pellets (containing metaldehyde), scatter them thinly (about 4-6in apart) and do not put them in heaps. Ideally, set them under slate or under a small plank of wood where the slugs are likely to congregate, and in this location the pellets stay dry and are out of sight of other wildlife. If in doubt, opt for organic pellets based on Ferric phosphate, such as Growing Success Advanced Slug Killer, as these are approved for use by organic growers and pose no threat to people, pets or wildlife.

3. **PLANT** summer-flowering bulbs and corms as soon as the soil can be worked easily and the fear of the worst frosts have passed. Popular favourites such as dahlias, gladioli and lilies can be established where you want them to flower. However, tender bulbs, such as Calla, Canna and tuberous Begonias are best started off in pots, or in the case of tuberous begonias, in shallow pots or seed trays on a warm, well-lit windowsill or heated greenhouse/conservatory. A 50:50 mix of Perlite and multi-purpose compost is a good mix to get the roots well established.

4. **YOU** will need to be quick to get your bare-rooted shrubs, trees, fruit and hedging plants in before the plants come out of their dormancy period. Timing is crucial – remember the soil preparation ideally needs to be carried out a week or two before planting, but as the season moves on, a Plan-B option is sometimes best. Clear the area of grass, all weed growth and aim to allow 2ft (60cm) of clear soil around the base of your plants as any competition around the root zone is not good. Do improve the soil but above all try and get the plants in, watered and trimmed back (if required) quickly.

5. **CREATE** your own festival of colour for this summer with our range of bedding plug plants. New to us this season are Garden Buddies and the range includes cutting raised Pelargoniums (Geraniums), named varieties of Fuchsias, foliage hanging basket and container plants and much, much more. These plants will require frost protection, so simply pot into a 9cm pot using a multi-purpose compost and keep in a frost free, well-lit location.



6. **ROUTINE** Cut back *cornus* (dogwood) and *salix* (willow) grown for colourful winter stems. Mow the lawn on dry days (if needed). Top dress containers with fresh compost such as Arthur Bower's Multi-Purpose Compost, but use an ericaceous compost on plants such as Japanese Maples, Pieris and Rhododendrons. Lift and divide overgrown clumps of perennials, especially the Hostas. Weeds come back into growth so deal with them before they get out of hand, annuals are best treated with a sharp hoe or you could spot treat with a weedkiller (see What's New). Open the greenhouse or conservatory doors and vents on warm days to allow good air circulation and to keep the temperature balanced.

7. **THINK** of new ways to add height to the garden this summer – either structurally using arches, obelisks and even bamboo wigwams planted with your favourite variety or colour of sweet peas, or simply by growing a taller plant. Tree lilies are receiving plenty of attention in gardening magazines of late and these are well worth growing! Planted in a sunny spot in well-drained soil they can reach up to 8ft tall when in flower! Do find them a sheltered spot but still stake them, and somewhere you can see and enjoy them. Varieties in stock include; 'Pink Explosion', 'Yellow Rocket' and 'Starburst' (white with a pinky red stripe), priced at £2.99 per bulb. Limited availability.



8. **CLEAR** weeds, ivy and other unwanted plants from beneath hedges as these can compete with your hedge line.

Likewise, keep climbing plants in check – Ivy (*Hedera*) is best kept within bounds, especially if you are growing it along a fence or wall. The aerial roots can and do damage concrete, unpointed brickwork and house rendering, so keep it in check. However, on good surfaces ivy can benefit the house by providing an

effective insulation layer so can keep heat in your property. Ivy also provides useful accommodation for birds and wildlife. However, if you need to get rid of the ivy, first cut the plant at soil level severing the roots and then apply a weedkiller such as Round-Up or use Tree Stump & Root Killer before the end of March before the sap starts to rise. Do follow the instructions carefully before using.

9. **LAST** opportunity for root-wrapped roses. We still have a few varieties of Grade-A plants including bush, patio, groundcover, climbing and rambling - available for immediate planting. Roses need a well-prepared soil and well-worked soil with plenty of compost or well-rotted manure, bonemeal will need to be added as well applying RootGrow to the roots just prior to planting. Remember the current thinking is to just bury the graft of the rose beneath the soil surface by no more than 5cm.

Water generously in dry spells through the spring and summer to ensure good establishment. Finally, keep aphids, blackfly, mildew, black spot and rust at bay with a routine spray of Roseclear Ultra.

10. **SOW** crops of Summer Cabbage, Beetroot (opt for a bolt resistant variety such as 'Boltardy' and 'Moneta' (Suttons), Lettuce, Radish, Spring Onions, Broad, French and Runner Beans (mid April), greenhouse crops including Tomato 'Shirley' and mini Cucumbers such as 'Cucino' F1 hybrid (T&M).

Onions without tears

Ignoring the forever useful potato, writes Pauline Brown, I think the vegetable I use the most must be the onion, in its many forms. For years I have cursed having to prepare onions as my eyes stream and really hurt whilst peeling them, despite trying to stop this by peeling them with large glasses on or doing them under running water. This was until I heard a trick which I find really works. I thought I must pass this on to our readers in case there are any of you who suffer as I did. All you need to do is to start from the root end of the plant, cut across to remove the root then peel upwards making sure you do not damage the tip of the plant. Only cut through the tip just before cutting the onion up and magic – no tears!



It is interesting to think that onions were cultivated by the Egyptians not only as food, but for placing in the thorax, pelvis or near the eyes during the process of mummification.

Pliny also recorded six different varieties which were grown in Ancient Rome and for years it has been known to be an excellent antiseptic and diuretic, and the juice was used for coughs and colds. There are many other uses one hears onions were used for. For instance, both the bulbs and stems, if applied as poultices, were thought to cure carbuncles, or the juice if mixed with honey and rubbed onto a bald patch vigorously, was supposed to make the hair grow again! Growing onions can be done either by seed or by planting 'sets'. Using seed is by far the cheaper method but 'sets' are less fussy as they are more tolerant of heavier soils and do not need the high level of fertility that plants grown from seed do.

Also they are quicker to mature, tolerate cooler conditions and are less likely to be attacked by onion fly or mildew. However, they are more prone to running to seed but using heat treated 'sets' reduces this risk. When planting 'sets' in late spring when the soil has started to warm up, they need to be pushed into the soil so just the tip is exposed. However, birds find them irresistible and pull them out until they have started to root, so some form of protection may be necessary.



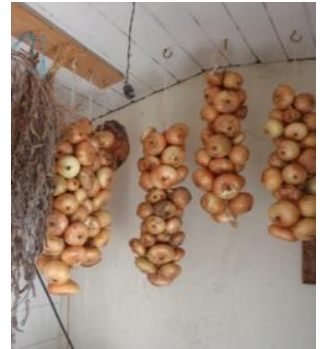
If growing from seed, which will give you a far wider choice of variety, I would cover the soil with cloches or polythene to ensure it is warm, as cold wet soil leads to poor germination and disease. If you need to thin the crop do this when the soil is moist as this

will deter onion fly. Also, if parsley is sown with onions this companion planting is said to keep onion fly at bay.



Once established, onions need little attention except for keeping them weed free. A mulch can be advantageous as with this watering will not be necessary except in periods of drought. However, come late summer or autumn the mulch should be scraped away from the onion to expose it to the sun. The onions should be harvested after the tops have bent over naturally and the leaves have begun to dry out and rustle.

After lifting, the crop should be spread out in the sun to dry then the easiest and most attractive way to store onions is to make an onion 'rope'. Use either untreated natural string or strong raffia, tying two onions by their dried leaves to form the base, then tie the onion one after another upwards so they just sit on each other. Finish with a firm knot at the top and leave enough string or raffia to make a loop to hang the 'rope' on. In this way air will circulate around the onions reducing the possibility of rotting. Hang in a frost free position and cut and use when needed.



All the above refer to the bulb or common onion, (*Allium capa*. Alliaceae) but there are many other forms of onion all with their uses. A few of these are:

Spring Onions otherwise known as bunching or salad onions. These are easy to grow from seed. To get a good regular supply they should be sown at about 2 to 3 weekly intervals from late spring to early summer. They need to be kept regularly moist for a good crop.

Pickling Onions. These are small bulbous onions which are sown from seed, dealt with in the same way as common onions but are excellent for pickling.

Shallots. These are grown in the same way as common onions, but instead of getting one large bulb the onion divides and develops into a small cluster. They are milder in flavour than common onions, so can be cooked or eaten raw and as they are small can also be used for pickling. If you get a good crop it is possible to save some of the dried shallots to plant out in the following year. There are many other types which I will not mention, but I think you will all agree that we cooks would be far worse off if we did not have our onions!



Spring pond fever

There's plenty of activity in the Aquatic Department as the new pond fish and pond plants section will be completed over the next few weeks, so a perfect opportunity to re-visit your own pond, or make plans for one for this spring.



As the weather begins to warm up, you need to be weaning your pond fish off wheatgerm food and moving over to a medium protein food such as Tetra Pond Sticks, but only if and when the weather begins to warm up! Any temperatures below 8°C, continue with the wheatgerm. Hopefully, the worst of the frosts are now past.

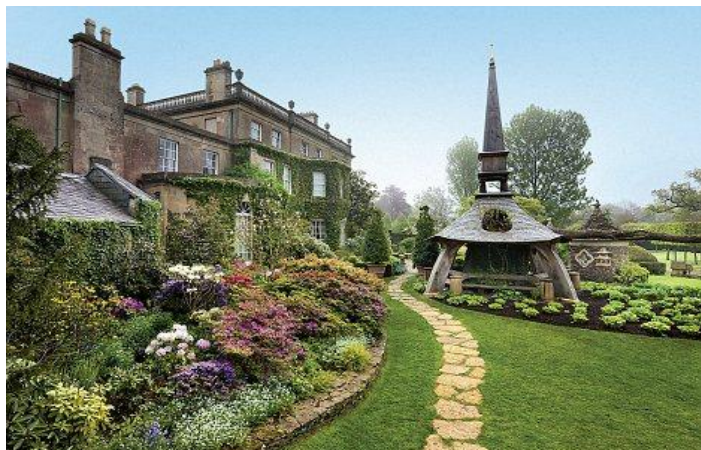


However, it may pay to consider covering your pond with suitable netting as herons are more likely to pay a visit in colder conditions, where they know they can get food!

Just a reminder on the shop floor we now sell pre-mixed salt water! Please ask in store for details. Finally, from 1st March we are holding an aquarium tank clearance sale to make space for our new ranges, so there will be some great bargains to be had. So, do pop in and grab a bargain before they all sell out!

Highgrove Gardens and Great Dixter Garden/House Tour visits

We are pleased to announce two Garden Visits over the summer months. On Wednesday 23rd May and 25th September we are going to Highgrove Gardens* in Tetbury (pictured right). This is a truly unique opportunity to have a guided tour around the gardens of HRH Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall. There will be plenty of time for a meal and look around the gift shop at the end of the tour. Price, including coach, admission and tour guide is £48.



Last time we arranged a visit to Highgrove the 24 available seats sold almost immediately, so don't delay if you would like to come.

On Wednesday 15th August we will be visiting Great Dixter Gardens and House (pictured right),* the property of the late and great garden luminary, Christopher "Cristo" Lloyd. There will be a tour of the House as well. Coach, admission to the garden and house tour will be £40. 36 seats available.



For full details of these visits and to book, please contact our Customer Service Desk where a full itinerary will be available for each trip.

*Terms & Conditions apply.

Nurturing the next generation of gardeners



At the Garden Centre we have always encouraged the 'little ones' to get involved in gardening and over the years we've entertained school groups locally. Back on the 2nd February we had a sizeable group of children and teachers from Class 7 of Milton Keynes Preparatory School close to Whaddon. Split into three groups the children spent time with Kate Williams and learnt about chickens and their lifecycle, discovered different types of fish with Danielle Homewood in the aquatics department and learnt about plants, including seed sowing and learning about sensory plants with

Pauline Brown and Chris Day.

They enjoyed each of the presentations before being moved onto the next one, a welcome lunch break and they were off sowing broad bean seeds for their vegetable garden back at school. The children kindly sent us a wonderful selection of their impressions of the visit,

artwork and photos and you can view these at our Customer Service Desk. Stand out comment: "Best school trip ever!" well that made our day!

Do let us know if this type of visit to Buckingham Garden Centre would be of interest to your school. Time allowing we would be delighted to arrange this throughout the school year.

Taking the graft out of growing veg

Over the last year or so there has been much talk about grafted vegetable plants – mainly Tomatoes, Cucumbers and Peppers, writes *Chris Day*. We are pleased to announce that this spring we will be offering a wider range of grafted vegetables (Turbo Veg) which will be coming from Suttons Seeds.

So, what makes grafted plants different? Well, for starters they are more vigorous, producing larger plants than non-grafted varieties – so at least one extra truss on tomato plants. They also benefit from a better resistance to pests and diseases together with less susceptibility to nutritional disorders. Furthermore, grafted plants tend to perform better at lower temperatures in your greenhouse (so saving on fuel) and finally the top quality fruits can be enjoyed over a longer cropping period, up to 75% more fruit than standard plants is being claimed.



Well, they say the proof of the pudding is in the eating and I grew three grafted tomatoes for the first time last year and they were excellent – my main observation was the great vigour, larger trusses and the overall cropping period – we were eating fruits from the plants as late as early December and had a few for our Christmas salad too! In view of what I had heard, I did provide one Arthur Bower's cropping bag per plant, so there was plenty of compost and growing room for them. Suttons Seeds have tweaked the grafting process again this year with the graft just above the first true leaves rather than lower beneath the seed leaves (cotyledons), so maximizing growth.

I'll certainly be growing the tomatoes again this year, together with the grafted peppers, cucumbers and aubergines, and it will be interesting to see if these live up to the Turbo Veg reputation too! Price: From £3.99 each. Multi-buy offer 3 for £10. Available Late April.

Garden Talks: – Forthcoming in March, April & May

Just a reminder of our popular Wednesday talks programme, which commence at 10am (new time for 2012) in the Talks Room, Gardeners' Retreat Restaurant.

- Wednesday 14th March: The Garden at Coton Manor – Past, Present, Future. Speaker Coton Manor's Nursery Manager, Caroline Tait.
- Wednesday 11th April: The All-New Year-Round Container Gardener. Speaker will be Buckingham Garden Centre's Chris Day.
- Wednesday 9th May: The Making of the Hill House Garden and a Little of What Went Before. Speaker: Léonie Thorogood from Buckingham.

Chris is also on BBC Three Counties Radio, Sunday 8th April, between 3-4pm on the Gardening Phone-In with Ernie Almond.

STOP PRESS: Please note we are now stocking a range of gluten-free cakes in our Gardeners' Retreat Restaurant.

Buckingham Nurseries & Garden Centre

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WINTER OPENING HOURS (Until 25th Sunday March): Mon.-Sat: 8:30am-5.30pm, Sun: 10am-4pm

SPRING/SUMMER OPENING HOURS: Mon.-Sat: 8:30am to 6pm, Sun: 10am to 4pm