



Somerset Federation of Gardening Clubs

Issue LI

Autumn 2015

The trees from Redbourn to Hempstead are very fine; oaks, ashes, beeches. They are in great numbers, and make the fields look most beautiful. No villainous things of the fir tribe offend the eye here.

Hertfordshire 19th June 1822



What he, our land steward, can plant the fir for, God only knows, seeing that the country is already overstocked with that rubbish.

Sussex 24th November 1822



It is a bare heath with here and there some scrubby birch. It has been in part, planted with fir trees, which are as ugly as the heath was: and, in short, a most villainous tract.

Sussex 31st July 1823

William Cobbett 1763 - 1835 - Rural Rides

Somerset Federation of Gardening Clubs

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Website

somersetfederationofgardeningclubs.org.uk



Introduction

The Christmas tree, first employed at Strasbourg in 1605, was introduced into England from Germany by the Prince Consort in 1840.

Harmsworth's Encyclopaedia



Conifers imported from overseas had established themselves on the large estates of wealthy landowners long before Prince Albert imported the Norway spruce as a decorative feature of the Christmas season. Later on, they found their way into the suburban landscape where many still dominate our gardens, mine included. Sandwiched as it is between a line of tall Lawson's cypresses and a 80 foot spruce, part of my plot is a shaded woodland garden; a situation which would make that old ranter William Cobbett, a keen gardener himself, totally apoplectic. His targets included not only fir trees but potatoes - "extreme unction" he called them, Quakers, Jews, the Anglican clergy, Martello towers and canals.

I am a more tolerant beast and towards mid-December I plunder armfuls of overhanging greenery as decoration. Imagine Cobbett in a modern garden centre at this time of year, though some of us long to see the shop revert to its proper function and reveal the bargain spring bulbs we have forgotten to plant. Among the decorative and informative pieces of this issue, there are day to day nuggets to pass on to the appropriate person, e.g. the events form to be filled and returned and the Register update, and so on. Would Hon. Secs. please ensure the right people have the info they require to do the job.

You will also find an advance notice of next year's Annual General Meeting, hosted this time by Martock & District Gardening Society, who generously responded to the appeal for a venue in 2016. We are pleased also to publish the winning entries in last season's Writing Competition.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - 2016

Thursday 19th May

**Hosted by
Martock & District Gardening Society**

Open from 6pm for 7pm start

Illustrated Talk @ 7.30pm



Refreshments Raffle Plant Sale



Important amendments to the Speakers and Judges Register

Speakers

Delete:

page 6 - **Derek Briggs** - page 9 - **Chris Cudlipp** - page 17 - **David Manners**

Add:-

Rosemary Legrand (New Speaker) - Plants & gardens of Italy, Yunnan, Bhutan, NZ etc.
Beech Copse, 24, Riverside Rd., West Moors, Dorset. BH22 0LQ
Tel. 01202 873344 Email. Rosemary@pirltd.org.uk Web. www.talksongardens.org.uk
Band C - Travel 45p per mile.

John Studley (New Speaker) - Vegetable growing.
5, Windyridge, Lopen Road, Hinton St George. TA17 8SG
Tel. 07831 489391 Email. Johnstudley12@talktalk.net
Band B plus mileage over 40 miles.

Judges

Delete

page 31 - **Bill Thomas** - **David Rawding**

Errata

Note the following email address :- **Peter Holloway** – supplement 2014
pj.holloway@btinternet.com

Speaker - Change of Address

page 23 - **Ed Wells**. - Larkhill, Back Lane, Chardstock, Devon. EX13 7BR
Tel. 01460 221703
Email: e.wells125@btinternet.com

Hon. Secs. please note

Some of the Federations provisions do not appear on the website nor are they available on disc.

Clearly certain information is for the specific and exclusive use of the membership. The Speakers and Judges Register, the Draft Constitution and so on are only available as paper documents.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Message from the 'Data Base Secretary'

When receiving your newsletter or any correspondence from the Federation, would you **please** inform me if we are sending this information to the 'correct' contact for your club? Recent renewal forms from some clubs do not indicate who should be the main recipient! I am sure you would appreciate, that with over two hundred and forty odd member clubs, it's not possible to 'guess' who we should be contacting!

We would also be extremely grateful if you could advise us, whether you are willing to have your contact email address published on our website, and also if you are happy to receive the newsletter by email.

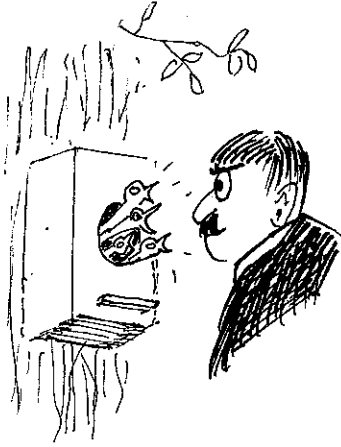
For those of you with email access, please contact me direct with your 'up to date' details: enquiries@somersetfederationofgardeningclubs.org.uk

or telephone: 01278 741152

If I do not hear from you, I will assume you are happy with the current arrangement.

Thank you for your co-operation, *Mo (Plomgren) Data Base Secretary*

Chairman's Corner Autumn 2015



Back last spring, I wrote that our garden here in Holford would primarily be for wildlife and that would in itself, bring challenges, not least those feasting on the crocus bulbs I planted earlier, however, it certainly brings tremendous rewards, some of which I will tell you about (God willing!) in the coming years!

"It's time" Mo declared, "that we spring cleaned the garage" (well, in fact a large shed, as we never put our car in there!). Always start at the top and work down I'm instructed...climbing up into the roof space I start to hand down box's, folding garden seats, off-cuts of wood, paint tins and so on...when I notice all over the vacated spaces, small nut shells - hundreds and hundreds of them; on closer inspection, nearly all are empty. I can't understand where they have all come from as we do not have nut trees in the garden and although we have oak on the hills behind us, these were not acorns! I do not know what nuts they are, but this happens every year and each time there are more! Obviously small mammals of sorts but I have never seen them....but one lesson learnt is that we do not clear the garage nowadays until winter is well behind us. Likewise not cutting hedges back until the birds and their chicks have fledged....which brings me neatly on to the following.....

Situated in the trees in our garden, we have placed a number of nest boxes which the local population use to roost in the winter and raise their young in the spring. As winter ends, I take them down, clean them thoroughly, ensure they are still water-tight and replace. Two of these boxes are quite deep (about six inches,) on taking them down, I discover that the whole box is filled from top to bottom with moss and soft straw, with a small tunnel disappearing inside - needless to say they were hastily replaced and I haven't touched them since. Again, I'm not sure what small mammal spent so much time constructing these superb new homes, but it would be tremendous if they were dormice....but I suppose we shall never know.

Now and again, I take 'a walk on the wild' side... or rather a walk up onto the hills. The Quantocks are not big compared to the moors and hills of Exmoor, but they have a charm and a rugged wildness of their own, and on the top - a 360 degree view to all parts of the county, towards the Bristol Channel and the coast of South Wales, to Exmoor, to the Blackdowns, the Brendons and the Mendips, and as the Quantocks are literally on our doorstep, we are so lucky that our garden leads onto the lower slopes. In the past our two cocker spaniels would accompany us on those walks across the hills, but sadly now, those walks are not quite the same as our eldest little dog (Benjie) passed away in March at the ripe old age of seventeen. The younger one (Toby, nearly fifteen!) is blind and probably couldn't do the distance nowadays, however, what hasn't changed when walking through the combes, or up on the ridge way, is that I still need to take a carrier bag with me to collect rubbish! It never ceases to amaze me that some people can have so much disregard for these beautiful surroundings, by leaving piles of rubbish, especially broken glass which can cause so much harm to the ponies, sheep, deer and small animals that roam those hills. On one occasion I found in a clearing in one of our combes, the remains of a barbecue (dangerous enough in hot, dry weather) where

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bottles, cans, sandwich wrappers, serviettes and the remains of food had just been left. It took two trips into the combe with plastic bin liners to remove it all to bring it back to our village. I wonder if those culprits would have left all this rubbish in their own garden after a barbecue? However, I like to have a little faith and trust in the human race and hope these occurrences are few and far between!

Well, I must come down off my soap-box and consider what's to be done out there in the garden..... there is always something to do..... but I enjoy every minute!

My warmest regards for the forthcoming festive season,

God Bless *Erl*



Balwen Mountain Sheep Fleece

My friend with the Balwen Sheep has some spare fleece for sale if anyone would like some. He keeps the fleece intact and they make wonderful wrappers for tender plants and would also make good mulch to protect things like left-in dahlias from frost. As I have said before they do smell a bit like lamb chops but the plants don't seem to mind.

N.B. Fleece will never turn into compost and will remain intact for hundreds of years. If you remember, they are the foundations of Salisbury Cathedral!

I give him £5 per dustbin bagful as a contribution towards his cost of shearing the beasties. If you are interested and could collect them from Hinton St. George, please phone me on 01460 76389

Lyn Spencer Mills



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John Starnes - Past President - SFGC

It is with much regret that we record the death of John Starnes, former Treasurer, Chairman and Past President of the Federation. He was 97.

John joined the Committee soon after the foundation of the Federation and very early on was instrumental in establishing the Public Liability Insurance Scheme which many clubs enjoy today. He had a knack of getting things done quickly and efficiently, whether organizing a judges training course, re-phrasing a Constitution or sending off a tricky letter, always accompanied with a cheerful quip and huge satisfaction at a successful outcome.

So much of what the Federation provides is down to John's insistence on getting the details right, especially with the needs of the small club in mind. Meticulous in planning, he was an excellent organizer and his influence is evident in many aspects of the Federation's work. Outside gardening he loved music and sport and was a committed railway enthusiast and a regular volunteer with West Somerset Railway.

A keen cricketer he always played a straight bat and kept his eye in. Up until the last few months he was eager and delighted to hear news of the progress of the Federation.

We shall miss his wise guidance, good counsel and cheerful optimism.

Pip Harwood

Bill Thomas Hon. Treasurer 1991 - 2012

It is with much sadness that we announce the death of our late Treasurer, Bill Thomas. He had been in poor health since last year and went to live with his much loved daughter Alison in Cambridge, who had made him a ground floor suite of rooms in her own home. In May of this year he was diagnosed with motor neuron disease and this progressed with painful speed. He died sitting in his favourite armchair, with the Autumn sunlight filling the room and a gentle breeze circulating from the open window looking out onto the garden. Alison was with him at the time of his passing.

The Federation owes him a huge debt for his long service to the Committee, being one of the founder members. He served us as Treasurer for many years and combined frugality with a willingness to save us all money. Indeed, it was the membership at the AGM three years ago who insisted that our annual club subscription be put up to £10 instead of £7 which it had been for at least eight years! His horticultural knowledge was wide and he was always willing to pass this on. It was a great pleasure to steward for him at our local flower shows and I learned a great deal from him about perfection in vegetables. He has also left behind him a group of judges in Somerset who benefited from his expert tuition in our judging courses. He was meticulously careful, thoughtful and above all, a kind man, and we shall miss him.

Lynn Spencer-Mills
President

Bramble Removal: How To Do It

I have, and I am sure you have, torn hair out with trying to overcome the problem of getting rid of brambles. I found this excellent article on Rachel's (the gardener) website: www.rachel-the-gardener.co.uk. Rachel has kindly allowed me to reproduce her article for you. A look at her website is well worth a visit. David Talling

I've given this lecture twice recently, so I thought I'd be generous and share it with you guys.

"Given this lecture" did I say? How pompous! "Explained this principle" might be better. Or shall we say that I have been asked about removing brambles correctly, and this is the advice and information that I have given out.

Brambles - don't you just hate them? They grow faster than almost anything else in the garden, they have evil sharp skin-slashing thorns, they tip-root themselves everywhere, and, as a final insult, at the end of the year, instead of dying down and rotting away, the canes solidify into tempered steel with titanium thorns, linking themselves into huge mats specifically to prevent us from getting at the roots to remove them.

OK, for a couple of weeks in late summer/early autumn they are laden with delicious fruit, but come on, the rest of the time they are a complete nuisance. Especially if they are in your garden...

In my experience, there are two "types" of bramble problem.

First and most often found, are the ones which have rooted themselves in cracks in walls or paving, and which sprout a fistful of thin spindly shoots every year. They trip us up, scratch our ankles, and although we chop them right off at the ground, they still come back within a few weeks to annoy us again. They rarely fruit, so they aren't contributing anything, just being a nuisance.

The second type are the "real" brambles, great thick squared-off stems, miles long, covered in lethal thorns and forming an impenetrable forest, not to mention the long arms, waving in the breeze and lunging at any unwary passer-by. These are indicative of brambles that have been allowed to run wild for a couple of years or more.

Here's the botanical bit: both "type" are the same plant, *Rubus fruticosus agg*, or blackberry, or bramble. Yes, bramble and blackberry are the same plant. There are many closely-related sub-species or micro-species of blackberry, so it is known as an aggregate species, hence the *agg* at the end. There are many specially-bred garden cultivars or species, bred for flavour, for early cropping, and for size of fruit. (Which, incidentally, is not a "berry" at all, botanically speaking, it's an aggregate fruit consisting of a number of drupelets. Fascinating, huh?) And there is even a selection of thornless varieties, and personally I can't understand why anyone would want to grow a thorny one, when they have the option of being thorn-free with the fruit being just as tasty. In my own garden I have thornless blackberry, and they are the ones that I sell.

Blackberry or Bramble? It's completely your choice - I tend to use Blackberry for the ones grown for fruit, and bramble for the vicious escapees that I get asked to remove.

Now a quick word about their life cycle: it's a perennial plant, which means it grows back year after year from the same root. But it's a biennial cropper. Biennial means "in a two-year cycle". So in the first year, it sends out lengthy leafy growth in all directions,

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but no fruit. In the second year, these year-old shoots or canes produce little side-shoots which bear the flowers and therefore the fruit. After fruiting, these shoots die and become the brown tangles that we hate so much.

Each plant, though, is producing new shoots every year: so any one plant will have fresh vigorous non-fruiting shoots, plus last year's fruiting shoots, plus dead ones from previous years. Hence the insane tangle that you get.

If you are growing blackberries to eat, you need to "manage" them on a two-year cycle. Generally, this works best if you grow them against a wall, or if you build some sort of post-and-wire structure so that you can tie up this year's shoots to the bottom rung, and last year's shoots to the top rungs, for the best sunlight, and for ease of cropping. After harvesting, you chop out the fruited shoots right down at the base, then move the fresh shoots up to the top rungs ready for next year. As the new shoots grow, you tie them in to the bottom rung. It's important to keep them off the ground, otherwise the tips will root and make new plants. Which is fine when you want to expand your crop, but it does reduce the amount of fruit, and how many new plants do you actually need?

Right, now we understand the life cycle of the bramble. But, I hear you say, we don't care about its life cycle, we just want to get rid of it.

OK, bramble clearance.

"Type 1" spindly weedy things. Cut them off at ground level, using a knife if necessary to slice through the brown knobbly root part. In 2-3 weeks' time, go back and look for new leaves. Spray new leaves with Glyphosate weedkiller: the brand name used to be Round-up but it's out of patent now, so you can buy "own brand" types. Go back in another week or so, spray foliage again. Repeat until it stops reappearing. At that point, you may be able to prise out some more of the now-dead knobbly root part. For the rest of the year, keep an eye on it, and if it dares to make any new leaves, spritz them with the Glyphosate again.

"Type 2" mad bramble tangles. Typically found when moving into a new garden, when taking on a new allotment, after being ill for some time, when expanding the garden, or when suddenly developing an interest in your garden after ignoring it for several years. Also found pretty much all year round when working on restoring your local canal. Which I do in my spare time. ("Spare" time! Hollow laugh!)

The first job is to get rid of the top growth so that you can get to the roots. Best option: hire a man with a brush-cutter (a strimmer on steroids) to chop it into small pieces so you can rake it up and burn it. What's that? You can't do that? OK, in that case put on stout clothes, get your thickest gloves, a rake, and a pair of secateurs. Get as close as you can to the tangle, and start cutting out sections. Don't overstretch yourself, just cut everything you can reach, and if you cut it into pieces 2-3 feet long, it becomes a lot easier to get rid of it.

When you work your way as far as a root, leave a foot or so of growth so that you can find it later. There's no need to cut it down to ground level, just to clear it enough that you can move around the area without being tripped, snagged and scratched.

Continue doing this until you have eaten your way through your bramble thicket.

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You should by now be tired, sweaty, scratched and cross, and ankle-deep in bits of bramble. Well done! Rake up the bits and dispose of them.

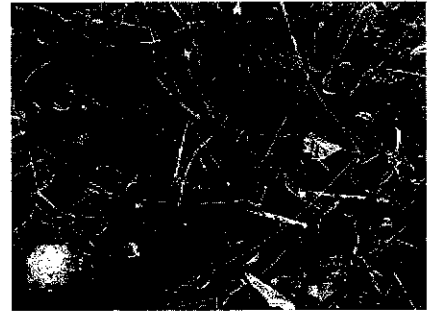
Take a break.

Right, phase two. You can now tackle the roots. If you don't, they Will Be Back.

Now, here's the useful thing to know about bramble roots: they don't sprout from ground level, as normal plants do: they sprout from just below ground level. This is what catches most people out: they chop off the top growth, right down to the ground, then wonder how it keeps re-growing. This is why Type 1 are so persistent: when growing in paving or in cracks in walls, you simply can't get to the growing point, hence the instruction to use Glyphosate, which is a translocated weedkiller, meaning that it doesn't kill the leaf that it lands on: it penetrates the leaf, works its way down the stem to the root, then kills the root. Yay for Glyphosate!

Right, class, are we paying attention? Sit up straight, no fidgeting, here we go.

Here (right) we have a typical bramble: it has the green shoots which bore fruit last year just starting to go brown, and some brown dead canes from the year before. This is, by the way, a fairly spindly example of the type.



First we clear away the leaf litter around it, to see what we have. To avoid being spiked in the eye, at this point I generally chop off most of the shoots. There are no buds to be seen, but it would be a mistake to simply chop it off at ground level.

This is the same bramble, now reduced to just a couple of the shoots - it's often useful to have something to get hold of, plus if you get called away half-way through, it's handy to be able to find them again.



I am now scraping around at the base to expose the roots. You can see that I've dug down a couple of inches, that's all. Not much more than scraping away the surface soil, really, and done on hands and knees, with a small hand-digging tool.

Right! There, can you see it? A nice pink bud just visible, in the junction between the two remaining stems.

I can therefore cut off the root below this point.

Here's the cut-off root: you can see that I've cut it about 2" down - the white cut end on the right - and now you can clearly see that pink bud, just above my thumb.



Apologies (as usual) for the quality of the photos, taken in haste with my camera phone, which does not have a macro setting, unsurprisingly.

Here's a different bramble root from the same section of garden: again, a lovely plump pink bud springing up from well below the surface level, and which was completely invisible when I started to remove it.



In this case, I managed to get several inches of root out as well, but the important part, the vital part, is to get below that "crown" or growing section from which these buds spring.

So I hope you can see from this that removing brambles is not impossible, and you don't have to dig out yards and yards of roots. Just ensure you dig out the bit with the buds on.

And when you have cleared your former jungle, it is worth going back every couple of weeks to check for new growth: if there have been brambles there before, there will be bramble seeds in the soil, and although you have carefully removed all the monster plants, you will continue to get new seedlings for some years. Tiny ones are really, really easy to get out - many of them will even just pull out, if the ground is soft - and it is so worth while to keep on top of them, having put in all the effort to remove the big ones.



**Home
Start**
Support and friendship
for families

Home Start Sedgemoor



WANTED - A KEEN GARDENER

With expertise in fruit and veg who could work alongside our families in a voluntary capacity for a few hours a week.

This is a great vehicle to not only bring parents and children together to learn about healthy eating and growing your own, but by its very therapeutic nature, it will encourage conversations and strengthen individual support networks whilst also proving a stimulating and healthy environment for children to spend some time in.

Home-Start Sedgemoor is a family support charity based in Bridgwater. Our core work is supporting families who are facing difficulties in times of crisis; this work is carried out by a team of home visiting volunteers who offer practical help and emotional support.

For more information about our work in general, please visit our website:
www.homestart-bridgwater.org.uk

Members were asked to write something in a Technical, Humorous or Romantic style and the following were judged to be the best in each category. Thank you to all who entered. The entries were of a very high standard .

Our Garden - Winner of the Humorous Category

"The flowers that bloom in the spring - Tra La" - (not to mention the summer, autumn, and yes, the winter) - have everything to do with the case. (With apologies to Gilbert and Sullivan!)

Our sunny, south facing, back garden features mainly flowers. A few pots of herbs lurk conveniently on the paving near the back door but, other than that, flowers and shrubs predominate.

As I write on this late January day, there are certainly signs of those "Flowers that bloom in the Spring" with bulbs shooting up in profusion, and the promise of blooms later on.

But, that's not to say that there's no colour in our garden at the moment. A brief stroll around the beds revealed blossoming heathers, snowdrops, a solitary primrose, cyclamen, hellebores, rosemary, winter flowering jasmine, winter flowering pansies, the first of the crocuses, a smattering of yellow forsythia buds just showing colour, and tucked right at the base of the plant, the first camellia blossom! It would be a sad day if we went out and found nothing in bloom, though I have to confess this is more by accident than design.

Our garden contains an eclectic mix of plants we inherited & kept when we moved into our retirement bungalow: and plants we have chosen to add. Some of these latter have sentimental associations, like the bright orange lilies that are the descendants of a single bulb we found abandoned in a pot when we moved into our first home and which have increased and multiplied and graced the gardens of every home we've lived in since. Or there are the plants that have special significance because of their origins. There's the clematis that grew up the north facing wall of our neighbour's garden, so that it could scramble over the top to flower in ours. The cuttings we took when we moved have thrived and I think may even give pleasure sharing themselves not only with us but also with our neighbour here. And that's not to mention the agapanthus, the collection of which all started when we were on holiday in Guernsey one autumn and some seeds just happened to fall into my hand from the plants in one of the public gardens.

Others are deliberate choices such as my husband's collection of fuchsias, which began many years back when he got to know a lady who at one time had been national president of the fuchsia Society. There was quite a story behind her involvement, for it was her brother who had started a fuchsia nursery in order to raise the finances he needed to train to become a missionary. He made a great success of the nursery which his sisters then took over, and some of our fuchsias are named for family members - the Reverend Doctor Brown, President Margaret Slater, Phyllis, etc. and one commemorating his work in Papua New Guinea - Mission Bells.

Our garden gives us so much pleasure - and without very much deliberate planning we enjoy flowers that bloom - not only in spring but on through summer, autumn and on into winter as well, delighting us whatever the season.

Joyce Pipet

Burnham-on-Sea & District Horticultural Society

My Garden - Winner of the Technical Category

In 2010 I moved house and thus acquired another 'new' garden, my sixth in the past 30 years. One had been used by the previous owner to service Land Rovers and nothing grew through the swamps of sump oil; another was so overgrown that it wasn't until a hawthorn thicket was cut through to the far boundary that a greenhouse was revealed, putty long gone but glass intact held in place by overarching brambles.

So new place, new start. An herbaceous border was a must, so I consulted Gertrude Jekyll's writings to discover that her famous border at Munstead Wood was 200 feet by 14 feet with a service path in front of backing shrubs. She did admit that keeping the border in flower from July to October was an achievement, not only of careful planning but of constant attention to dead-heading, removal of plants past their best and infilling with potted ones although she accepted that in an 'ordinary garden it is quite unreasonable to expect that this can be done.'¹ Not for me then.

But wait, according to Christopher Lloyd, by the 1980s the herbaceous border was generally thought to be 'outmoded', requiring far too much labour; the mixed border had taken its place². This seemed worth a try. Shrubs provide structure, colour and texture, say a hebe, a smoke bush, maybe *Hydrangea villosa*, one of the few hydrangeas whose colouring varies little with soil conditions, and evergreens including the dwarf bamboo *Pleioblastus viridistriata*, with green and gold striped leaves, best cut down annually for brightest colouring. Add traditional herbaceous border stalwarts such as phlox, dahlias, hollyhocks, kniphofias, lupins, day lilies, Michaelmas daisies, rudbeckias and, for scent, modest cottage garden favourites like clove carnations, mignonette, stocks, wallflowers and nicotiana.

What about colour? Attempt classic cool grey-blues through to fiery oranges and reds? Too like a shade card. Try to emulate Vita Sackville-West's white garden at Sissinghurst? White flowers tend to go off and are prone to scorch, so forget that. Maybe the scheme Mrs Reiss devised during her time at Tintinhull is worth a try.

But we all know this is wishful thinking. Most of us take over an established garden and haven't time, energy or resources to commit to wholesale redesign and replanting. So it's a case of gradually introducing your ideas and accepting the compromises this entails.

My current plot has been by far the easiest to adopt, and adapt. Originally it fronted a couple of ham stone cottages built in the late 1700s, later amalgamated to provide a house for the village schoolmaster. On becoming a private dwelling hard landscaping divided the small garden into distinct areas. Shingle paths, a couple of grassy sections and a paved patio were laid out. Sensibly, the well was retained and affords plentiful water for the garden without any worry about a ticking meter.

As chance would have it, the garden already featured a narrow border backed by a paved service path, hardly necessary but a boon when clipping the hedge behind. In place were an amelanchier, a neat tree with the double merit of fragrant white flowers in May and richly coloured foliage later in the year and *Spiraea nipponica* 'Snowmound'. To these, 'Aztec Pearl', a delicate form of *Choisya ternata*; the ebullient *Helleborus argutifolius*, with spring clusters of apple-green flowers hidden beneath sharply-toothed leaves and *Miscanthus sinensis*, a grass which transmutes into a fountain of bleached russet tones with the onset of autumn, have been added to provide further structure.

Somerset Federation of Gardening Clubs

I guess like many gardeners most of my alterations and additions have been made piecemeal. With restricted space I don't give room to plants I'm not fond of so out have gone a well-established clump of montbretia shooting from subterranean necklaces of old corms (a corm for each year of growth), a peony, a couple of tree ferns, *Alchemilla mollis* (which self-seeds too enthusiastically), a boring weigela, a rampant Japanese anemone and *Ligularia dentata* 'Desdemona' its beautiful purple leaves unfortunately far too attractive to slugs and snails.

In have gone favourites, undemanding and easy to grow: *Euphorbia polychroma* with vivid greenish-yellow flowers which combine especially well with 'black' tulips; adaptable hardy geraniums; the evergreen cushion-forming Phlox *subulata*; *Gillenia trioliata* whose delicate white flowers seem to dance on their wiry red stems throughout the summer; *Verbena polaris*, with mauve flowers, a smaller compact version of the ubiquitous *V. bonariensis*; and hellebores, hellebores, hellebores, any variety (except the promiscuous *Helleborus foetidus*), any colour, single or double. Fortunately a specialist hellebore grower lives not far from here. Dry and unpromising-looking ground at the foot of the utility room wall has proved ideal for the gorgeous scented winter-flowering lavender-blue *Iris unguicularis*. This is what Vita Sackville-West has to say about it: 'Kindnessconsists in starving it. What it really enjoys is being grown in a miserably poor soil, composed mostly of lime mortar rubble and even gravel. Sun and poverty are the two things it likes.'³ It is native to Algeria, Greece and the Middle East and needs a sunny stony site to replicate its home conditions.

An unexpected pleasure has been getting acquainted with resident plants which were new to me, for example, the hardy winter-flowering *Cyclamen coum* and *C. cilicium*, climbing roses and a fremontodendron, wall-trained to flower throughout the summer (though I've learnt to avoid its leaves which shed an irritant dust) and, as a native of California, is another plant well adapted to poor dry soils. Less pleasurable has been coming across a deep bed of cinders and soil containing broken glass, household china and tiles (even pieces of clay pipes), evidence of previous occupants.

I'm ashamed to admit that the 'vegetable patch' still has to receive serious attention. At a time when everyone seems to be acquiring allotments I've only managed to harvest runner beans, garlic, herbs and rhubarb but have laid down an asparagus bed though the first cut won't be for another three years.

Then there is the problem area, erstwhile site of an old cable drum table and rough log seating. It's at the side of the house but I can't claim 'out of sight, out of mind' as I've been mulling over what to do with it for over four years! In my mind's eye I see waves of slug-free hostas, candelabra primulas, Himalayan blue poppies and maybe an Elizabethan knot garden.

But this is yet more wishful thinking.....

References

- 1 *Gertrude Jekyll, A Gardener's Testament (Antique Collectors' Club, 1982)*
- 2 *Christopher Lloyd, The Adventurous Gardener (Penguin Books, 1985)*
- 3 *Vita Sackville-West, 'The iris that thrives on sun and poverty', The Observer, 19 February 1950*

*Kathryn Sturtridge
East Coker Gardening Club*

My Garden - Winner of the Romantic Category

My garden gives me pleasure, solace interest and a challenge.

The pleasure is looking at it first thing in the morning, when everything is fresh and sometimes, with dew on, almost magical while the plants wait for warmth and sun to open and show their varied forms of colour.

In the evening it gives me solace after a busy day or after something has happened making me sad, it is quiet and peaceful with the lovely colours of the sky as the sun sets.

The interest and challenge is in planting seeds, not knowing whether they will germinate or not having grown them whether they will look as the packet says they should.

Planting plants in the hope they like our soil and if they do, taking cuttings to fill empty spaces.

I will always have to have a garden to keep me company.

Doreen Dewar.

President, Enmore & District Gardening Club



SOUTH WEST ALPINE FLOWER SHOW & PLANT SALE

ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY EXETER GROUP

West Exe Technology College

Heatherleigh Road

Exeter

EX2 9JU

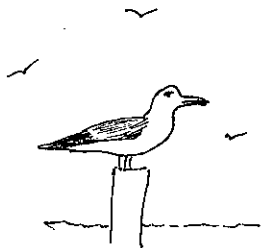
Saturday 30th April 2016

Plant Sales open at 10am (13 Nursery Stalls)

Show Opens at 12 Noon until 4pm

£3.00 (AGS Members Free - YES FREE)

SEAGULLS?



We all love our gardens and we love to see birds in our gardens and can probably name them, but unless we live on the coast of our island, do we know much about the seabirds? They're all sea gulls aren't they? Not exactly. They're all seabirds but how many can we identify?

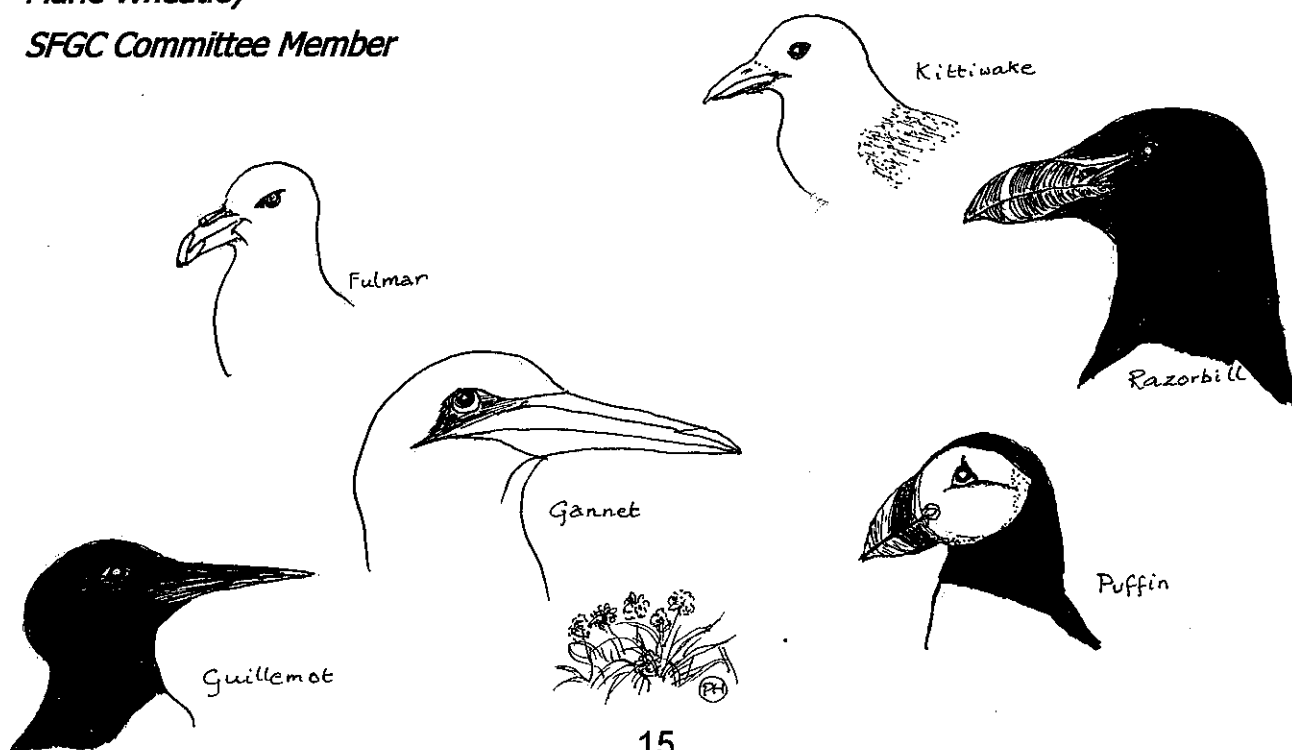
To name just a few: Fulmars, are the most prolific. Herring gull has a red spot on its bill that the young peck at when they're hungry. Kittiwake, their call tells us how they got their name. Gannet, the biggest seabird. Guillemot lay their pear-shaped eggs directly onto the rock. Razorbill are jet black and the bill has a vertical white line. Shags are a dark glossy green and in summer sport a punk-like crest on their heads. Puffin, they only visit our shores in spring to breed their pufflings.

Are we aware that the cliffs and rocky islands of north and west Britain hold some of the largest seabird concentrations in Europe? One such area is England's largest seabird colony on the east Yorkshire coast at Bempton cliffs near to Flamborough head. Here RSPB stewards are on hand to answer questions, focus their telescopes on the nests spectacularly perched on ledges and in crevices on the 300 foot white chalk cliffs, and to explain any bird's life cycle.

Most impressive of all, because of its 6 foot wing span, its gleaming whiteness, its powerful flight and spectacular plunges, must be the gannet. Over 200,000 pairs, three quarters of the world's population nest in just 15 colonies off our coasts. Interestingly, they mate for life, about 25 years, and having wintered off the coast of West Africa return to the same nesting-sight to lay and rear just one egg. The fledgling is black and white and as it grows its age can be estimated by the amount of white coverage. When ready to leave the nest the young bird is much heavier than its mother and spends much time belly-flopping on the water until its wings are strong enough to sustain flight. Then it goes off to join other young birds in a sort on youth club until at about 4 years old it is ready to mate. So the cycle continues. Fascinating.

Marie Wheatley

SFGC Committee Member



MY SEVEN 'DESERT ISLAND' PLANTS

An almost impossible task with at least another twenty or thirty for consideration.

Quercus Robur - the English Oak: a wonderful broadheaded tree to remind me of home and our superb countryside giving shade and logs for the cooking fire.

Davidia Involucrata - the Handkerchief tree: Nothing can beat the sight of the wonderful white bracts in May and the marvelous story of its introduction by the plant hunter Ernest 'Chinese' Wilson.

Liquidambar Styraciflua: this is a 'must' due to its wonderful autumn colour. It will grow into a large specimen tree and the cultivars 'Lane Roberts' and 'Worplesdon' are excellent forms.

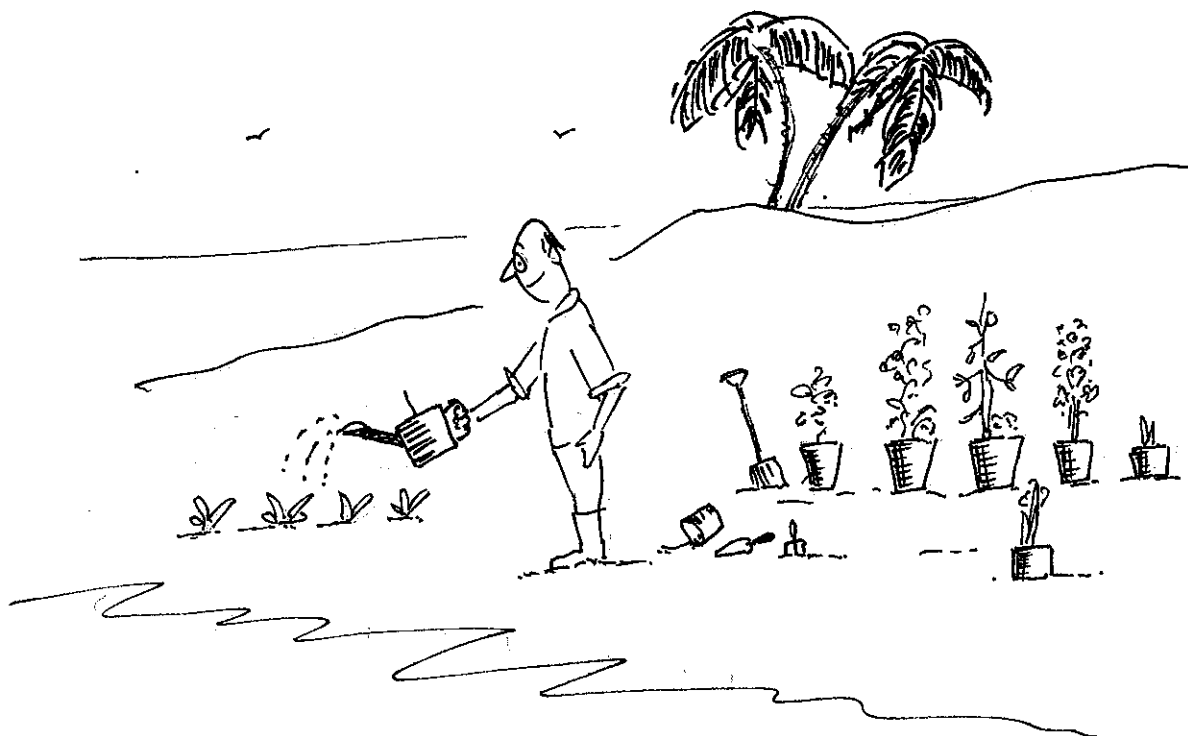
Lonicera Fragrantissima: it is so important to have a plant that provides scent during the winter months and this winter flowering honeysuckle has masses of sweetly fragrant cream coloured flowers.

Clematis Cirrhosa var. Balaerica: the fern leaved winter flowering clematis producing in winter pale yellow flowers spotted reddish purple followed by silky seed heads. Think of a delicious egg custard with a sprinkling of nutmeg!

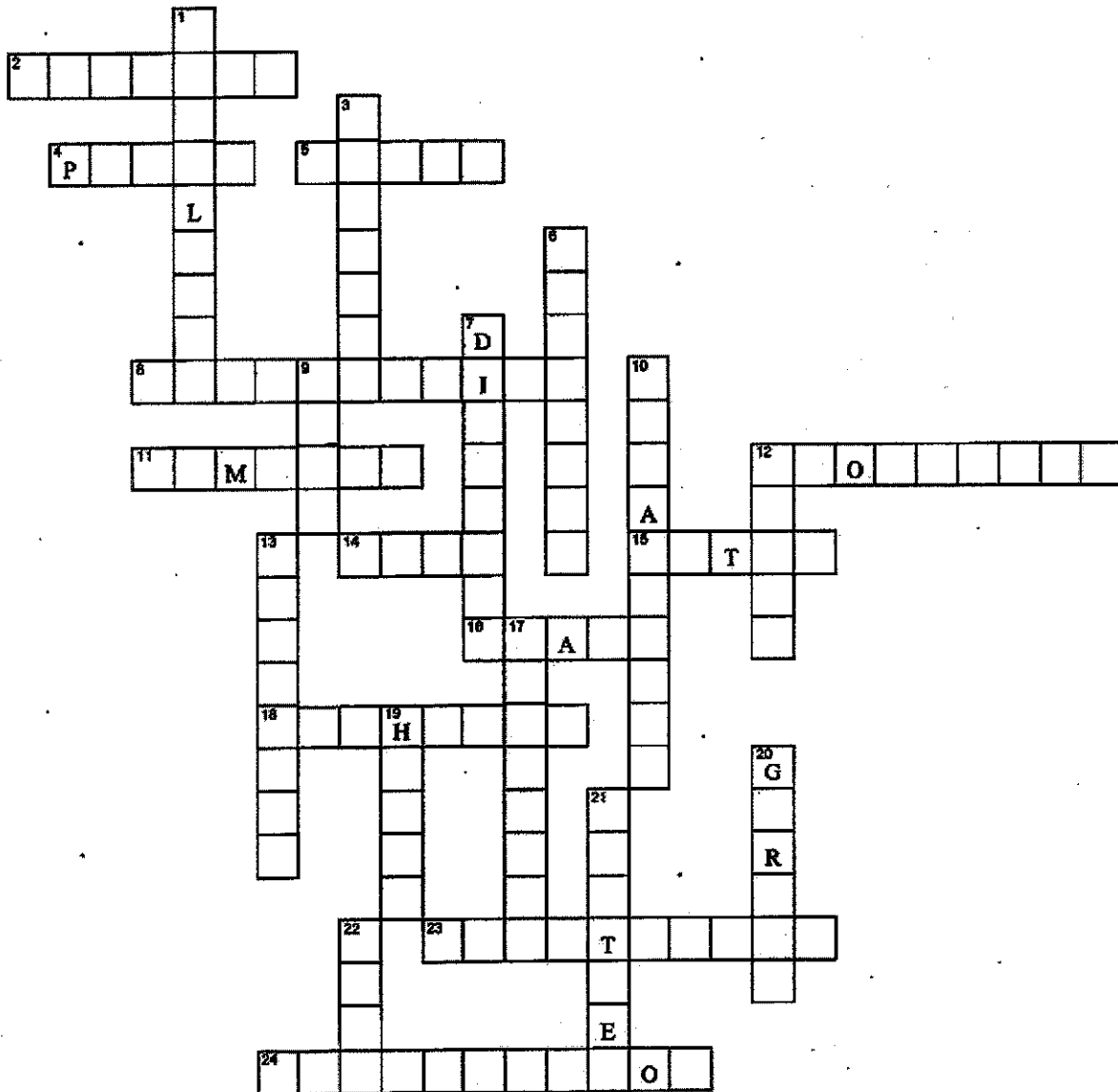
Lathyrus Odoratus: the Sweet Pea is one of my favourite flowers. Deliciously scented it can be allowed to scramble over twiggy supports or be carefully trained to provide quality blooms for the island show bench!

Dahlia 'David Howard': a wonderful cultivar with its deep orange decorative flowers arising from deep smoky bronze foliage. One of the best and will be grown to enjoy the jungle border or as a cut flower.

Nick Rigden



Gardening Crossword



Across

- 2. Snip, clip....
- 4. Annoying
- 5. Paved area
- 8. Widely cultivated native of S. Africa
- 11. Decaying vegetation
- 12. Wintering in a valley
- 14. Not for sleeping in
- 15. Essential for life
- 16. A playing card suit for cultivation
- 18. ...sparkling with a million blooms.
- 23. Edible seed or root
- 24. Helps in moving

Down

- 1. Parasitic bush
- 3. baskets
- 6. Don't you just hate them
- 7. Abnormal functioning
- 9. Absorbs water and minerals
- 10. A must for Wimbledon
- 12. Inspiration for later work
- 13. Christmas import loved or hated
- 17. To fix firmly
- 19. Christmas decoration
- 20. Place of peace and beauty
- 21. Variable
- 22. Some people have spectacles of this colour

Answers, if required, will be in the next edition of the Newsletter

Final Cuttings

For the second year running the Federation seems to have lost more members than gained as clubs close through lack of support; a trend afflicting many organisations across communities. People immersed in their own little bubbles don't know what they are missing. So we say goodbye to Valley G.C., Stockland, Ilminster in Bloom and Nempnett, but we welcome most warmly Bampton in Bloom, Street Chrysanthemum, Dahlia & Vegetable Society and the Historic Roses Group.

As for next year, your Committee is looking to revise the Speakers and Judges Register with a view to a new issue in 2017. In the meantime would Hon. Secs. and the programme secretaries please make a note of any speaker or judge who can be recommended to others and send it in to the Federation. There is a particular shortage of speakers on vegetables. Don't forget the judges.

Talking of which, a couple of highlights brightened a rather iffy summer. The first was an invitation to present the prizes at the Somerset Fuchsia and Pelargonium Society's show in West Monkton, where the hall was sparkling with a million blooms of fuchsias in a hugely pleasurable display. The summer display of flowers, fruit and vegetables at Castle Cary was equally inspiring on a dreary day. One category which appealed was in the children's section where the entrants were invited to fill a matchbox with as many things as possible. The winner managed 64 different items. Well done to all who made this possible and this applies to every Show across the region

And lastly, my thanks to my fellow Committee members who field and channel your concerns and information, in particular to Mo who wrestles with the thing called a database My special thanks go to David Talling who will be taking on the management of the newsletter to some extent and who has collated and presented the contents of this issue. And my thanks to all those who made a contribution.

On which grateful note I would like to extend on behalf of your Committee good wishes for Christmas and a productive and decorative New Year.

Pip Harwood
Hon. Sec.



