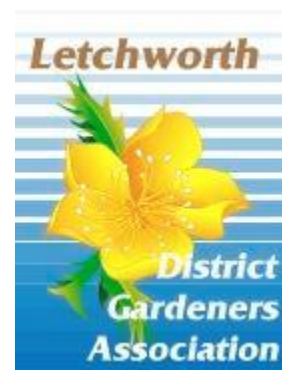


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Gleanings from the Compost Heap



Spring 2004

Editorial

“Spring is sprung, de grass is ris, I wonder where de boodies is?” says the song of the Bronx. I know where two magpies are – they are nest building 15 metres up a big conifer in my garden. These two I view with disfavour. No point in seeking advice from the RSPB. The last time I did five years ago I was told they are not a problem and that numbers were static. They are not classified as vermin.

In spite of what they said our resident songbird population dwindled. Hardly surprising considering Mrs. C. actually saw, through the window, a magpie settle by a blackbirds nest and systematically clear the eggs from it. The blackbirds never came back. Only last year did they reappear in force, together with tits and finches, sparrows and thrushes. It was significant how few magpies were to be seen through this period.

Now the magpies are back. Summer’04 presents a bleak future for the feathered chorus which lives in our hedge rows.

RHS - Wisley visit

Plans are in hand for a visit to the gardens at Wisley on Monday 6th September. Arrangements with the R.H.S. are being finalised, a 50 seat coach has been booked. Cost per person will be about £7. Full details will appear in the Summer edition of the “C.H.” Watch this space

Store news from Peter Faulkner

There has been a large demand for seed potatoes this year, and as I write this we only have a small amount left. We are now stocking larger gravel and seed trays.

I have on occasions been asked for shallots. I would need to order a large quantity. So I would appreciate if you could let me know either at home or at the store if you would like me to stock them. If the demand is sufficient I will order for next year.

May I remind you that the Store is only officially open on Sunday mornings. We do have a team who restock on a Wednesday if required and who have on occasions been able to serve members who call. However we cannot do this if the team is too busy or do not have access to the till. If you do need something urgently and can’t wait until Sunday, give Roger Cannon or myself a call. We will let you know if we are able to help.

Growing Pains

We are now well into Spring when trays and gardens receive seeds of thousands of different species and va-

rieties. Never has the gardener enjoyed such a tremendous choice.

At the end of February “Look East” reported that the seed suppliers Unwins were closing their Histon site to concentrate their business in Cheshire. One of the reasons given was the growth in sales of starter plants and plugs at the expense of seeds in packets.

Certainly there is a trend amongst gardeners to abandon the chore of raising seed in trays, pricking out and potting on. They realise it is much more expensive to buy plugs especially when ordering several different varieties, each in trays of 50, costing four times the price of seed.

It is to be hoped that Unwins will not be contracting their business of raising seed bred and grown in the UK. Such seed has evolved to flourish in our maritime climate. We know that other well known names in the flower and vegetable scene are importing rather than growing seed, often from countries bordering the Mediterranean. Does this tell us that climate change really has arrived?

Asylum Seekers

An article in the “Guardian” in early March reported a new plague to hit the South East. It is the Green Indian Parakeet, now breeding in their thousands in Surrey and Kent. Just like the coypu, the grey squirrel and Canada geese they have no predators and are very destructive. It seems these parakeets live on fruit so sales of wire netting and fruit cages are set to soar. Tough luck on commercial growers and vineyards.

Tree Planting

Trees, particularly broad leafed deciduous varieties, are the life blood of environmentalists’ enthusiasm. Such trees are air purifiers, soil stabilisers and homes for wild life.

Now and again town planners put tree protection orders on a few, particularly in or near conservation areas, but only a small percentage is protected. It is not unusual for these orders to be ignored, with topping, lopping, even felling, undertaken by travellers masquerading as tree surgeons.

I was fascinated by a letter in the “Times” which reads:- “Sir, Friends planning to build a house near Munich found that in Bavaria it is mandatory to plant five trees in their garden and were given a list of acceptable species from which to choose.”

What a brilliant idea! It does not say how big the garden needs to be to support this extension to the Black Forest.

If the NHDC, LGCHF and Stevenage BC were to issue regulations requiring every new house to have just one tree, it might help Hertfordshire from going the way of Middlesex with its wall-to-wall bricks and concrete.

An item for the forthcoming Town Council perhaps!

A few notes about us from Peter Hollingsworth

All the collectors have called on last year's members or have received an invitation from myself. At this point in time we are quite a lot down on last year and I would urge you to get some more of your neighbours involved in the LDGA.

I am leaving home to work abroad for two years and so my tenure as Membership Secretary is postponed for a while!! The job is being taken over by Kathy Bee, who I can assure you is a lot more organised than I am!!

So give her all the support that you have given me over the last 6 or so years. Her phone number is 01462 672134 you may like to amend your membership card.

You can start by volunteering to do a collection on one of the following areas:-

1. Lytton Avenue, Meadow Way, Sollershott area.
2. Heathermere, Lammis . Southfields area
3. Cashio Lane, Norton Road area
4. Cowslip Hill, Icknield Way, Longmead
5. Arlesey
6. Ickleford

The Tanglewood Trophy

As the old stagers know we run a best kept allotment competition. Unfortunately we omitted to include the entry applications in the pack this year. The competition is open to any member with an allotment in Letchworth Garden City. The winner gets to keep a large silver cup for the year which should be a good conversation piece and your "partner" will have the pleasure of polishing it as often as he or she likes. Your name will of course be engraved thereon for future generations to see. The winner and the two runners up get cash prizes. If anyone would like to enter please give our Chairman a call on 01462 742475 asap and she will give you the details.

FROM WILLIAN WILDERNESS TO NEW GARDEN - IT WAS PAINFUL BUT WORTH IT

By Barry Bremner

When you buy a "new house" and you are told by the estate agent that the plot will be rotovated and seeded, you don't expect to find that it also includes a 300-square-meter area of dense thicket hiding the underground homes of several families of rabbits and rats, the remains of a flint building, a disused sewer, a builders' dump, and a Victorian rubbish tip - not to mention the site of 150 years of bonfires. On top of all this, the debris of hundreds of smashed beer and wine bottles,

probably discarded by poachers and tramps, would have given a flying start to a glass recycling business!

But that was exactly what my wife, Terri, and I discovered when we moved into the converted Old Stables at Roxley Court, Willian, last summer. It would have frightened the living daylight out of a *Ground Force* producer.

It was obvious that it would be too big a task for the two of us to tackle on our own, so we consulted the professionals. With the help of the Internet, Yellow Pages and the local press, we compiled a list of landscaping companies and called them in to talk to us about clearing the plot and preparing gardens designs. It was then that we found out why the directors of landscaping companies drive around in BMWs and Jaguars. Even three moonlighting building workers wanted £12,000 for the job, and that didn't include a design.

We decided it was time for Plan B and that we would use small local contractors for each aspect of the operation. The thicket was made up of a jungle of snowberry bushes, two or three meters high, and substantial shoots from around a multitude of old tree stumps, and needed clearing first. The local services pages in *The Comet* produced a name (Clear-your-Jungle Ltd. or some such title, "no job too big or too small"), and Mr. Clear-your-Jungle visited us. "Oh yes," he said, "no problem. I've got all the right equipment, you know", and gave us a date. Jolly nice young chap he was. Trouble was, he didn't turn up, you know, and neither did his equipment.

Two more companies and two more non-appearances later, our neighbour - who by this time had a Chelsea Flower Show gold medal garden with a lawn on which the world bowls championships could have been staged - gave us another name to contact. This one came to see us the same day, turned up when he promised and in no time at all, the jungle had gone.

This development was not welcomed by our rabbits. I say "our" rabbits because the jungle clearance work had failed to scare them away from the burrows in our plot, as we had hoped, and they switched their nightly eating habits to the seeded grassy areas of the garden and invited their bunny friends from all the other parts of Roxley Court to join them. Our plot was totally surrounded by so-called anti-rabbit fencing, but these long-eared, grass-munching visitors had no trouble at all digging their way in every night and digging their way out when they'd had their fill of our rapidly disappearing lawn.

Author's note: In the next issue of Compost Heap, I shall reveal how we chased the animal population away and took the site to the stage where it is now showing signs of a being a very interesting and exciting garden.

If you have any comments on the "Compost Heap", have an article suitable for future issues, or are willing to help with distribution in your area, please contact me Jack Collins on tel 01462 682723 or at:- 12 Cashio Lane Letchworth Herts SG6 1AX. If you are prepared to help with the annual membership renewal contact KathyBee at 14 Paddock Close tel 01462 672134