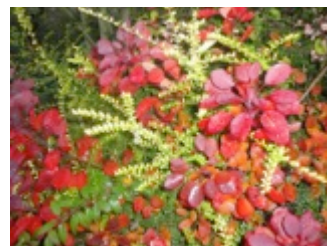


Issue 1 November and December 2016



November and December in the garden

- Prune blackcurrants, blackberries & raspberries and then clear away and burn all pruned wood and fallen leaf.
- For the strongest sweet pea plants in 2017, sow the seeds now. The roots will develop while the soil is still warm giving the plants a good head start next spring.
- Plant garlic and onion sets and complete the trimming of hedges for the winter.
- It is a good time to plant trees and shrubs so that they can establish before the cold winter weather sets in.
- It is not too early to clear out the greenhouse, thoroughly wash it inside and out (paying particular attention to the nooks and crannies) and then insulating at least the lower parts with bubble plastic. This is so that it is ready for sowing the first few 2017 crops that can be started inside a cold greenhouse in January.



Christmas Tree history

Around 6.5 million trees are sold in Britain each year, of which the Forestry Commission supplies just 100,000. However, the Commission typically plants 150,000 Christmas trees each year, about half of which are Noble fir (*Abies procera*), which is the best Christmas tree for holding its needles. The Forestry Commission manages Britain's two biggest Christmas tree outlets. These are Cannock Chase, Staffordshire and Delamere Forest, Cheshire. The growing times for Christmas trees are: Pine - 5 years, Spruce - 7 years and Noble Fir - 10 years.

These days more than 90% of UK families put up a Christmas tree and between 100-150 million families in Europe will put up a real Christmas tree. This custom was brought to England by Prince Albert when he introduced them from Germany where they began being used in the 17th century. The Prince wrote in 1847 that his children should "delight in the Christmas



Tree". Interestingly it is believed that the ancient Egyptians brought green palm leaves into their homes in winter to symbolise life over death and that the Romans decorated trees with metal objects as part of their winter Saturnalia festival.

How to care for your Christmas Tree

When a Christmas tree is cut, more than half its weight is water. With proper care, you can maintain the quality of your tree by adopting the following tips:

- Displaying trees in water in a traditional reservoir type stand is the most effective way of maintaining their freshness and minimizing needle loss problems. Use a stand with adequate water holding capacity for the tree - as a general rule, stands should provide 1 quart of water per inch of stem diameter.
- Once home, place the tree in water as soon as possible. Make a fresh cut to remove about a 3-4cm thick disk of wood from the base of the trunk before putting the tree in the stand. Most species can go 6 to 8 hours after cutting the trunk and still take up water. Don't bruise the cut surface or get it dirty.
- If needed, trees can be temporarily stored for several days in a cool location. Place the freshly cut trunk in a bucket that is kept full of water.
- Check the stand daily to make sure that the level of water does not go below the base of the tree. With many stands, there can still be water in the stand even though the base of the tree is no longer submerged in water.

Mistletoe (*Viscum album*)

Often used as a symbol of renewal because it stays green all winter, mistletoe is famed for its stolen-kisses power. But the plant also is important to wildlife, and it may have critical value for humans, too. Extracts from mistletoe are used in Europe to combat colon cancer as they show signs of being more effective against cancer than standard chemotherapy.



- There are 1,300 mistletoe species worldwide, more than 20 of which are endangered.
- All mistletoes grow as parasites on the branches of trees and shrubs.
- Ancient Anglo-Saxons noticed that mistletoe often grows where birds leave droppings, which is how mistletoe got its name: In Anglo-Saxon, 'mistel' means 'dung' and 'tan' means 'twig,' hence, 'dung-on-a-twig.' Mistletoes produce white berries, each containing one sticky seed that can attach to birds and mammals for a ride to new growing sites.
- When a mistletoe seed lands on a suitable host, it sends out roots that penetrate the tree and draw on its nutrients and water. Mistletoes also can produce energy through photosynthesis in their green leaves.
- As they mature, mistletoes grow into thick, often rounded masses of branches and stems until they look like baskets, sometimes called "witches' brooms," which can reach 5-feet wide and weigh 50 pounds. Trees infested with mistletoe die early because of the parasitic growth.

Letter to the Editor

Letter: "Is there a difference between narcissi and daffodils? I always thought that the former was just the scientific name and the latter, the common name, but looking at one merchant's catalogue (J Parker) they list them as separate items each in their own section. Also, I have a planting trowel, a free gift from a BBC Gardener's World magazine, years ago, which gives recommended depths for planting, and shows narcissi as 3cm whereas daffodils are shown as 6cm."



Reply: Narcissus is actually the name of the daffodil genus, so from a scientific standpoint, daffodils (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*) are a type of narcissus. The type most often sold under the name "narcissus" is actually a different species (*Narcissus papyraceus*), or Paperwhite Narcissus, which is a smaller plant with smaller, white flowers.



From the bookcase – one item that has stood the test of time!

An excellent RHS book entitled 'The Vegetable Garden Displayed' is really well worth owning if you are keen on homegrown vegetable production. I have found it on Amazon and I hope this link works OK - <http://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Vegetable-Garden-Displayed-Larkcom/dp/0906603870>

Horticultural quotations

- Gardening is not a rational act. - *Margaret Atwood.*
- Gardening is the purest of human pleasures. - *Francis Bacon.*
- I long for the bulbs to arrive, for early autumn chores are melancholy, but the planting of the bulbs is the work of hope and always thrilling. - *May Sarton.*
- To forget how to dig the earth and to tend the soil is to forget ourselves. - *Mahatma Gandhi.*



Plan it, plant it – top ten trees to plant this autumn - HTA

Whilst most of nature is hibernating in the colder months, winter is the prime time to get new trees into the ground, making them the idea HTA Plant of the Month for November. Trees are best planted in the late autumn, especially bare rooted varieties. Newly planted trees do best when exposed to moderate temperatures and rainfall and they need time to root and acclimatize before the onset of summer heat or the harsher temperatures of winter. Container grown trees can be planted at any time of the year providing the soil / ground is not frozen or water logged. If you're planning to plant trees in the garden then do it now before the ground gets too hard or frozen whilst you can still position them in wet and dry land. They can tolerate acidic, chalky, sandy and clay soils and come in all shapes and sizes. Trees can add structure to the landscape and garden and some make excellent hedges and screens whilst others are ideal as statement specimens. From flowering cherries and crab apples to evergreen yews and weeping willows trees offer different leaf size, shape and colour. Many

have attractive flowers, fruits and seeds and there are those that flower magnificently in spring and those whose leaves offer brilliant autumn colour just before leaf fall. Steve McCurdy of Majestic Trees has recommended the top ten trees to plant this autumn:

1. Himalayan Birch (*Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii*)
2. Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*)
3. Snowy Mespilus (*Amerlanchier lamarckii*)
4. Christmas berry 'Red Robin' (*Photinia fraserii* 'Red Robin')
5. Freeman's Maple (*Acer freemanii* 'Autumn Blaze')
6. English oak (*Quercus robur*)
7. Pin oak (*Quercus palustris*)
8. Crab apple (*Malus* 'Evereste')
9. Crab apple (*Malus* 'Rudolph')
10. Vilmorin's mountain ash (*Sorbus vilmorinii*)

By planting trees you can reduce or improve your carbon footprint and generally enhance the environment. Trees can transform an area by introducing welcome shade, protective shelter and wildlife and are an investment for future generations. Research in HTA's Greening the UK campaign has shown that just a 10% increase in tree coverage in urban areas will counter the predicted 4°C temperature over the next 100 years caused by climate change and the urban heat island effect. All trees require some support and protection such as stakes, tree ties and tree guards. Fertiliser can be added to the planting hole and mulch can be added after planting to preserve moisture and keep down weeds. Plant of the Month point of sale materials can be purchased through HTA partners Hortipak and Floramedia. The plants included within Plant of the Month have been nominated and agreed by the HTA Ornamentals Committee and the HTA Retail Management Group to ensure the campaign meets the needs of both growers and retailers.

The aim of the Plant of the Month campaign is to make it easier for gardeners by selecting a plant on a monthly basis that will be looking great, is widely available from UK nurseries and easy to maintain in the garden. For more details, please visit www.the-hta.org.uk/plantofthemoth

UK conker trees under threat from alien invading moths

The UK's conker trees are under threat because native insects are losing the war against an alien invader. In less than three decades the horse chestnut leaf-mining moth, *Cameraria ohridella*, has spread from Greece to almost the whole of Europe, arriving on these shores around 10 years ago. The moth, which burrows through the leaves of conker trees causing them to turn brown and die, was first spotted in south London in 2002 and can now be seen across almost the whole of England and Wales. Experts had pinned their hopes on a species of tiny parasitic wasps, related to the larger black-and-yellow variety, which use the moth's caterpillars to lay their eggs. But a new reported published in the online journal Public Library of Science ONE revealed that the wasps are failing to keep up with the voracious appetites and seemingly unstoppable spread of their rivals. In what has been hailed as a success for citizen science (if not for the conker trees), thousands of children across England and Wales were enlisted to record leaf damage and insect activity in their local area. Volunteers were asked to find a visibly damaged – and therefore infested – horse chestnut leaf, seal it in a plastic bag for two weeks, and count the number and species of insects that emerged at



the end. Worryingly for the trees, the research revealed there were far fewer wasps than hoped, and not yet enough to slow the spread of the moths. The study was designed to assess the impact of moths in a country where they had relatively recently arrived, and experts said there was still hope that wasp numbers might yet rally in response – as has been observed in other European countries. Lead scientist Dr Michael Pocock, from the Centre of Ecology & Hydrology in Wallingford, Oxfordshire, said: “This is the sort of science that anyone can do. “By taking part the public are doing real science - and the publication of this scientific paper is a demonstration of how seriously citizen science is now taken by the community of professional scientists. “It seems almost like magic for children and other people to put a damaged leaf in a plastic bag, wait two weeks and then see insects - the adult moths or their pest controllers - emerge, but making these discoveries was a valuable contribution to understanding why some animals become so invasive.” Co-author Dr Darren Evans, from the University of Hull, said: “By inviting thousands of people to get involved we, together, were able to pull this off much more cost-effectively.” A total of 8,000 people took part in the Conker Tree Science project in 2010/11.

National tree canopy map shows higher than expected tree cover

An aerial mapping company has completed what it says is the first ever detailed digital map of England and Wales' 20,000sq km of tree canopy cover. The National Tree Map from Bluesky uses up-to-date high-resolution aerial photography and infrared data combined with innovative algorithms and image processing techniques, and includes three map layers detailing more than 280m trees. The map is already used by several local authorities, businesses and academic institutions,



with interest also institutions, with interest also being shown from government agencies and utility companies. Applications include subsidence risk assessment by insurance companies, propagation modeling for telecommunication infrastructure planning, network resilience assessment for utility companies and carbon reduction planning for environmental mitigation projects. Bluesky is currently working to extend coverage to Scotland, and is also developing other GIS applications including a nationwide map of solar potential, citywide heat loss maps, 3D maps of trees and their proximity to buildings, and historical imagery.

Report highlights mental health benefits of gardening, growing and conservation

The mental health charity Mind has released ‘Feel Better Outside, Feel Better Inside’, a report including new findings from the University of Essex showing the benefits of 'ecotherapy' for mental wellbeing. It has been proven to improve mental health, boost self-esteem, help people with mental health problems return to work, improve physical health, and reduce social isolation. Over the last five years Mind funded 130 Ecominds projects with support from the Big Lottery Fund. These projects have introduced more than 12,000 people with and at risk of developing mental health problems to gardening, food growing or environmental conservation work.

RHS - what's on in London?

17 - 18 December 2016 - London Christmas Show

14 - 15 February 2017 - Early Spring Plant Fair

28 – 30 March 2017 - London Spring Plant Extravaganza & Orchid Show latter two days