



A bi-monthly electronic newsletter covering a number of topics related to gardening and the broader horticultural industry

May and June 2017



Topical tips

- Support your taller herbaceous plants with twigs or plant supports as soon as possible and before they are needed.
- Plant your tomatoes under glass and feed them after two weeks at weekly intervals with a balanced feed. The nitrogen : phosphorus : potassium (N:P:K) ratio should be about 6:3:10, avoid excessive nitrogen.
- Feed lawns about 2-3 days after mowing and just prior to rain. Most feeds contain herbicides and moss killer. Water it in if no rain falls within 48 hours and do not compost the clippings for the first two or three cuts.
- You can sow carrots until early June and doing so amongst onions should offer good resistance against carrot root fly. Whilst onions act as a deterrent, it is worth mentioning that root fly is attracted to parsnips, parsley and celery as well as carrots.
- If your hanging baskets look good in the summer but then run out of steam, press about 3 nasturtium seeds into each to be assured a good autumn display with minimal cost and effort.

Tomatoes – a bit of history

The origins of the tomato, *Lycopersicon* (Greek, wolf peach), can be traced right back to a coastal strip of western South America from the equator to about 30 degrees latitude south. Plants may be found up to an altitude of 3000 metres on the western slopes of the Andes but they rarely grow more than 160 km inland. It seems indisputable that the cultivated tomato, *Lycopersicon esculentum*, was introduced into Southern Europe soon after the Columbian discovery of the Americas. The earliest record was by P A Matthiolus in 1554 who referred to the tomato fruit as flattened, golden when ripe and eaten fried in oil. When the tomato was first introduced in Britain, it was treated with deep suspicion. Initially it was used here as a medicinal plant and even used for decorative purposes before being consumed as food from the mid-eighteenth century. Of course along the way, plant breeders and horticulturists have greatly changed the shape, taste, pest and disease resistance and yield potential of the commercially



produced varieties that we use today. Just by way of example, a good commercial yield as recently as 1977 was around 65 tons per acre, less than a third of what would be produced today. So, is the

tomato a fruit or vegetable? Tomatoes are specialised reproductive structures that contain seeds, in other words, they are fruits.

What are the nutritional benefits of tomatoes? - tomatoes are a good source of Vitamins A, C and E and contain minerals such as potassium, which has been linked to lowering blood pressure.

What is the link between tomatoes and cancer prevention? - the vitamins and antioxidants found in tomatoes are thought to combat the harmful effects of free radicals (rogue molecules) that cause cell damage - a precursor of conditions such as heart disease and cancer. Recent research has shown that the pigment lycopene, the stuff that makes most ripe tomatoes red, may be particularly active in protecting the body against heart disease and some forms of cancer.

What is the calorie content of tomatoes? - tomatoes are low in calories, typically containing only 14 calories per 100g. They contain virtually no fat and no cholesterol.

How much fibre is there in tomatoes? - the fibre content of a ripe tomato fruit is 1.5% of total composition.

What is the water content of tomatoes? - water content is between 93-95% of total fruit composition.

Finally - the largest UK tomato glasshouse covers 26.5 acres, but is currently being extended to 44.5 acres, or 18 hectares. That's the size of 25 international football pitches.

Horticultural quotations

Weeds are flowers too, once you get to know them. *A.A. Milne.*

Many gardeners will agree that hand weeding is not the terrible drudgery that it is often made out to be. Some people find in it a kind of soothing monotony. It leaves their minds free to develop the plot for their next novel or to perfect the brilliant repartee with which they should have encountered a relative's latest example of unreasonableness. *Christopher Lloyd, The Well-Tempered Garden, 1973.*



RHS 'Perfect for pollinators'

When lavender is in flower it is always surrounded by bees and butterflies collecting pollen and nectar. The Royal Horticultural Society have put together a list of plants to help gardeners identify those that will provide nectar and pollen for our bees, butterflies and other pollinating insects. Britain has 25 species of bumblebees of which 11 commonly visit our gardens.

A 'bumblebee' is any member of the bee genus *Bombus*, in the family Apidae. There are over 250 known species, existing primarily in the Northern Hemisphere although they also occur in South America. Bumblebees are used widely in UK glasshouses to pollinate tomatoes.



Plant of the month - *Doronicum orientale* - Leopard's bane

This clump forming, rhizomatous perennial should be in full bloom in April as the last of the daffodils fade. The bright daisy like yellow flowers will cheer any border. It will grow well in sun or light shade and is fully hardy. There are around 40 different species of *Doronicum*, all from temperate climes

across Eurasia and the Mediterranean. There are several species in the horticultural trade as well as hybrids and cultivars. The RHS plant finder lists the cultivar 'Miss Mason' as worthy of an AGM (Award of Garden Merit). *Doronicum orientale* 'Magnificum' appears to be the most popular with nurseries. The common name of leopard's bane refers to any plant of the genus *Doronicum* and indicates that this genus was once considered useful in destroying and warding off wild beasts! Now there's a useful garden plant!



Rhubarb wine

With rhubarb starting to grow strongly in many gardens, this simple recipe produces a great wine – fruity, crisp, slightly sweet and very powerful.

- **1.5kg rhubarb**
- **1.3kg sugar**
- **250ml white grape juice concentrate**
- **1 sachet general purpose white wine yeast**
- **1 tsp yeast nutrient**



Wash the rhubarb, then chop it finely into 6mm lengths. Place in a sterilised, food grade bucket and stir in the sugar. Cover with a lid or a clean tea towel and leave for three days. Crush the pulp with the end of a rolling pin then stir in three litres of boiled but cooled water. Strain through sterilised muslin into another clean bucket, add the grape juice concentrate and make it up to 4.5 litres with more water. Add the yeast (activate it if necessary first) and the yeast nutrient. Cover and leave for a week. Siphon into a clean demijohn and add a bubble trap. After three or four weeks "rack off" into another demijohn (this disposes of the muddy stuff at the bottom which can taint the wine). Any shortfall should be made up with a sugar syrup made from boiled water, three parts, to sugar, one part, and allowed to cool. When all fermentation has stopped, siphon into clean bottles. It is ready immediately though patience may have its reward!

Vine Weevil

You can often spot these black, wingless, beetle-like creatures on the leaves of indoor and outdoor plants. The signature semi-circular-shaped notches along the sides of leaves, caused by adults as they feed, are another tell-tale sign of a vine weevil infestation. The pale cream-coloured larvae meanwhile feed on the roots of plants destroying the root system and causing them to wilt and die. Both the adults and their larvae can be one of the most destructive pests to shrubs, small trees, garden and house plants. They can be a particular problem in pot grown plants and adults seem particularly keen to lay their eggs in peat based compost. Adult vine weevils are 1cm in length and wingless. They are dull black with light-coloured patching running down their backs. Adults are mainly nocturnal and only feed at night. Adult vine weevils appear between March and April from the soil of indoor pots, and between May and June from outdoor pots and borders. After mating, each female lays between 500 to 1,500 eggs into the soil around their favourite host plants. Eggs hatch ten-15 days later into white C-shaped larvae with brown heads, which begin feeding on roots, tubers, corms and the lower stems of susceptible plants. They grow to around 1.5cm in length. The larvae remain in the soil until they



emerge as adults. Most adults will die in late autumn when cold weather sets in. Overwintering larvae will feed on the deep roots in the soil and pupate around late April to early May.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/advice/pests_and_diseases/identifier.shtml?black_vine_weevil

Places to visit - The Alnwick Garden – a weekend trip maybe? c. 360 miles from Wickham

Always well worth a visit if you are in Northumberland, the Alnwick Garden is simply stunning. There is a wealth of information and some excellent images at <http://www.alnwickgarden.com/> When visitors pass through the archway into The Alnwick Garden, it is impossible to miss The Garden's extraordinary centrepiece, the Grand Cascade. A magnificent tumbling mass of water with spellbinding displays, the Grand Cascade is the largest water feature of its kind in the country. It is built into two listed earth banks from the 1850s, which create The Garden's slope. Every minute, 7260 gallons of water tumble down a series of 21 weirs, with riotous water displays on the hour and the half hour. Jets of water shoot high in the air and splash on the terrace as children run underneath them. Children also collect water from the water walls at the foot of the Grand Cascade in John Deere's mini tractors. The Cascade is surrounded by hornbeam pergolas which echo the stone curves, their windows looking onto the water. Beyond the pergolas lie rills and shallow pools. The Grand Cascade is built from local Darney stone, and computer-controlled by state-of-the-art equipment in the pump rooms below where the water is filtered and recycled. Through the



Venetian gates at the top of the Grand Cascade is the Ornamental Garden; a structured garden brimming with plants. Here, an intricate planting pattern is created with a play of light and shade, grey and green foliage, flowers, fruit and aerial lacework created by pleached crab apples. Follow inviting pathways bordered by lavender and fruit trees, and discover quiet places to sit and catch the sun. At the Ornamental Garden's centre lies a bubbling pool that spills into the rills that run throughout the Garden, and into two small secret gardens. Beds of bedding roses and delphiniums are edged in box, while cut flower species grow with annuals and bulbs alongside small fruit varieties.

<https://alnwickgarden.com/>

Places to visit - Wakehurst Place & Millennium Seed bank – about 64 miles from Wickham

Situated in West Sussex and set in 465 acres of country estate, Wakehurst boasts ornamental gardens, temperate woodlands, a nature reserve and an Elizabethan mansion. Surround yourself in the natural beauty of the area, join a walking tour, take afternoon tea, or learn about the essential conservation work of Kew's Millennium Seed Bank. For opening times and details of how to get there, please explore for Wakehurst from Kew's main website - <http://www.kew.org/>

The Millennium Seed Bank Partnership is the largest *ex situ* plant conservation programme in the world. The focus is on global plant life faced with the threat of extinction and plants of most use for the future. The seeds they save are conserved in seed banks as an insurance against the risk of extinction in their native habitat. Working with a network of partners across 80 countries, they have successfully banked over 13% of the world's wild plant species. With your help, they are going to save 25% of those species with bankable seeds by 2020 (75,000 species). They target plants and regions most at risk from the ever-increasing impact of human activities, including land use and climate change. *Wakehurst Place is really well worth visiting!*

Dahlias

The Dahlia has been in Europe for over two hundred years. It came from Mexico to the Botanical Gardens in Madrid towards the end of the eighteenth century and was named by Abbe Cavanille in honour of Andreas Dahl, Swedish scientist and environmentalist. The initial named species imported into Europe were *Dahlia pinnata*, *Dahlia rosea* and *Dahlia coccinea*. The first dahlias grown outside of Madrid were single (open-centred) & Multi-ray open centre, pendant stems, but it was not long before the horticultural growers of the day discovered the Dahlia was a natural hybrid and when grown from seed, it readily changed its form and colour, so that today we have a range of Dahlia types that offer something to please everyone. Today, there are cultivars in the form of the waterlily, the paeony, the orchid, the chrysanthemum and the anemone, to say nothing of the main formations like the decorative (flat, broad petals), the cactus and semi-cactus types (rolled, pointed petals) and the ball forms (globular flowers) that have as their smallest relative the popular Pompon Dahlias that beguile so many gardeners. There is every colour and colour combination to choose from, except the elusive blue (which we are still seeking) that is covered by the wide range of violet and mauve cultivars. Sizes range from the smallest types, called Topmix or Lilliput Dahlias to the giants that have blooms over a foot in diameter carried on powerful stems. Whilst dahlias are widely available, there is a great specialist nursery on the North Orbital Road near St Albans in Hertfordshire – AL2 1DH.



You can learn so much more about the dazzling world of the Dahlia by becoming a member of the National Dahlia Society. <http://www.dahlia-nds.co.uk/>

Royal National Rose Society

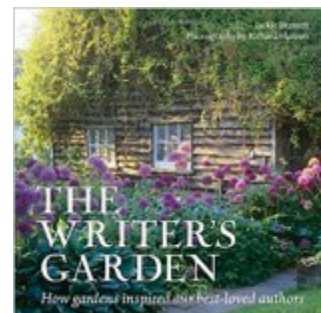


Just up the road from Ayletts is the Royal National Rose Society (RNRS) at Chiswell Green AL2 3NR. This is a great place and one of Hertfordshire's best kept secrets. Since 1876, the RNRS has supported and promoted this most iconic of flowers in all manner of ways, from encouraging best practices in propagation to trialling new species. Membership is open to all and includes unlimited access to the website, which offers guidance on all aspects of rose growth and care, together with all year round

entry to the Society's showpiece Gardens of the Rose in Hertfordshire. Explore their web-pages to find out more about the Gardens themselves, the Society's work in general and the important benefits you can enjoy as an RNRS member. <http://www.rnrs.org.uk/> The public open season is from Saturday 10th June to Sunday 6th August and they are open seven days a week during this period from 10am – 5pm (last entry 4pm). There is a tea room (10am – 4:30pm) as well. It is £6 for adults and children under 16 are free (no concessions). Dogs on leads are welcome. Access to the garden is always free to members who can also visit on weekdays at any time of the year. Membership is £34/person or £44 for a couple. More details about this at <http://www.rnrs.org.uk/join-us/individual-membership/>

A Good Read

THE WRITER'S GARDEN - How Gardens Inspired our Best-loved Authors. Written by Jackie Bennett, photographed by [Richard Hanson](#). In this book of 25 gardens, the author examines how the poet, writer, novelist derived a creative spirit from their private garden, how they tended and enjoyed their gardens, and how they managed their outdoor space. ISBN 9780711234949. This is a lovely book and worth considering if you are asked to suggest what you might like for your birthday/anniversary. The RRP is £25.00 but it is widely available at £19.99, maybe less if you search around.



RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2017

If you were thinking about going to the RHS Chelsea Flower Show this year (23rd to 27th May), then it may already be too late to buy tickets. However, please don't despair as the TV coverage is always very good. How about going to the RHS Hampton Court Flower Show (4th to 9th July) instead. It is easier to get to and far less congested! Just to whet your appetite, here are just a few photos from previous years.



The Editor would like to include as much local gardening and horticultural news as possible in future editions. For example, news of forthcoming events such as open gardens, pictures taken in your garden, questions, articles etc. My name is Mike and I can be reached at hallrainbow@btinternet.com - if you e-mail me please include the word 'Wickham' in the header of your message. Thanks.