



London & South & South East in Bloom Bloom Bulletin



Welcome to our June edition with a huge thank you to all those who have been happy to share their knowledge resulting in this “bumper edition”. The Trustees thought that articles on various gardening, horticultural and community topics would be of interest. I would, therefore, like to thank all of our contributors for taking their time and support.

As the Nation moves towards fewer restrictions we know community gardening has returned although sadly too late to marshal the judges and organise a visit, so we will be staying with the desktop assessment this year. We hope that many of your previously made plans can now be realised and we are looking forward to hearing and reading about your achievements in this most unusual gardening year.

However, there have been so many positives coming out from the lockdown. Nature has been able to develop without the intrusion of people, pollution has decreased by over 30% in places and our gardens are looking better than they have for years, or at least mine is.

We would also like to thank those individuals and groups who have made donations to the Bloom this year, as you might imagine our income has been severely reduced especially with no IYN Income and the loss of a couple of major sponsors, so, thank you so much for your support and we hope to get through this year and make 2021 and even greater Bloom event.

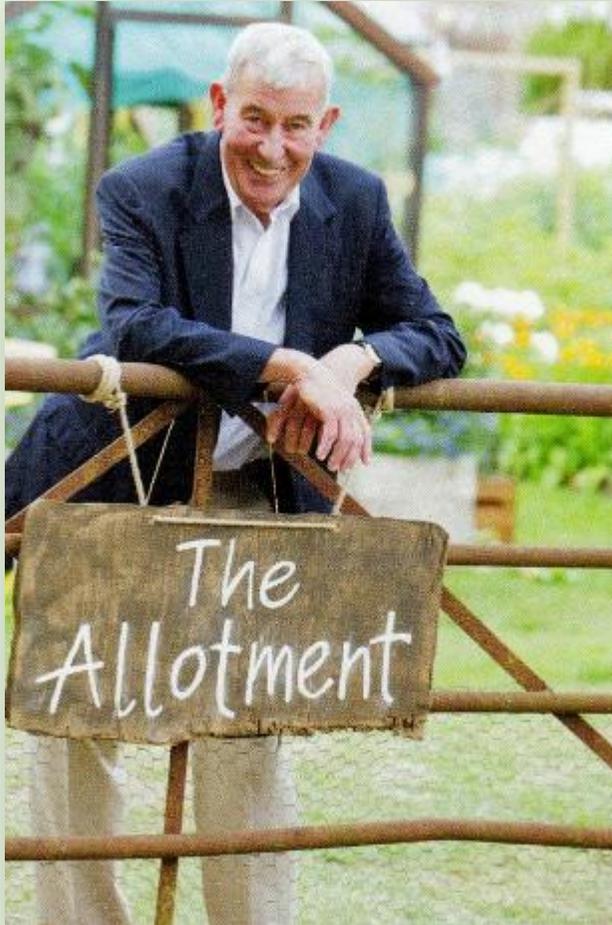
So, while staying safe and well lets now look to the “new normal” whatever that may be and carry on gardening, caring for our environment and nature and all work towards a better world post-COVID 19.

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Jim Buttress VMH, South & South East in Bloom Judge, Former London in Bloom Chairman, Chair of the Britain in Bloom Judges Panel.



Memories of a London in Bloom Judge.

One of the only advantages of the pandemic and self-isolation is that you have plenty of time on your hands. You are looking for things to do and suddenly your mind reminds you of all the jobs you were supposed to do but more enjoyable tasks prevented this taking place.

It is, of course, sorting out the attic, under the stairs, cupboards, chests of drawers and finally the garage. They all contain years of accumulated paperwork, family memorabilia, Newspaper and magazine articles, past hobbies. "Why?"

"Out of sight out of mind" or I might need that one day is the immediate explanation? I, therefore, decided to have a proper clear-out.

In the past, the biggest problem I had was to read every piece of paper, look at every picture and then promptly put them back into the filing cabinet or cupboard. So, it was now time to be disciplined and ruthless!

Rather than keep all this information I have decided to make several scrapbooks and just retain a record of the past. At the present moment, I am sifting through a cupboard containing my early days of being involved with London in Bloom. I am reliving many happy memories which I would like to share with you.

I started judging for London in Bloom in the late seventies when I joined the Central Royal Parks. At the time London in Bloom was administered jointly by the English Tourist Board and Keep Britain Tidy campaign. They insisted that all the judges were either retired Parks Officers or current staff from the Royal Parks, National Trust, Head Gardeners in private service, the prison service, or horticultural colleges. The reason for this decision was on the basis that these organisations would not have any conflict of interest with the local authority they had been selected to judge. At this time nearly all of London Boroughs and the two cities of London & Westminster took part. The original judging co-ordinator was Shirley Murgatroyd who was married to the late John Slocock owner of Knaphill Nurseries who specialised in Rhododendrons and Azaleas. Incidentally, he was also a judge for London in Bloom. After a couple of years Shirley retired and the late Isobel Stephenson and wife of Ashley Stephenson (the Bailiff of the Royal Parks) the then Chairman of London in Bloom, took over.

They lived in Rangers Lodge which happened to be next door to my office in the Hyde Park Store Yard. I felt very honoured when I was asked to be a judge and was on more than one occasion asked by Ashley to go and see Mrs Stephenson who would ask me to cover extra Boroughs when she had been let down by the non-appearance of the designated judge.

All judges were advised which Borough they had been allocated and the details of the Boroughs representative and their fellow judge. It was the duty of the senior judge to make all of the arrangements. The annual launch was held in the Martini Tower, which was on the top of New Zealand House, near Trafalgar Square, it was a very grand affair at which you could only drink Martini!!

The audience included the Borough Mayors and their Bloom representatives and the judges, each year the guest list of the great and good seemed to outnumber everyone else. London in Bloom had a large committee which you only saw at the launch and the awards ceremony and an equally grand contingency of Tourist Board and Tidy Britain executives. I can remember the Disc Jockey Peter Murray and Clay Jones, Chairman of Radio 2's Gardeners Question Time, being regular guests of Honour. One year the entire cast of My Fair Lady in full costume were present.

Once the arrangements were in a place you waited for the judging to start in July when an itinerary was prepared by the Parks representative for the visit. The tour/visit involved aspects of their responsibility within the Borough and would include a lot of Parks, Cemeteries, Town Hall Displays, plant nurseries if they still had one and hanging baskets in the high street.

In the early days, the campaign was very largely horticulturally based. There did not seem to be a time limit on the visit and the highlight of the day was the lunch. Depending on the wealth of the Borough it determined the type of transport and the lunch. Mayors car or Park Van, Sandwiches, or a Banquet, hence the Borough was selected for you and not the other way round. Judges were invited to the prizegiving at one of the Ministerial Buildings in Central London.

The campaign was divided into different categories according to the number of residents in the Borough, but the City of London and the City of Westminster competed against each other.

There was only a winner in each category, however, there was a 1st, 2nd, & 3rd in the Floristry Competition which was competed for by the Floral Art Clubs selected by their respective Borough. They were all given the same title for an arrangement and they had to make them on the day of the award ceremony at the chosen venue and the entrants were given no feedback.

More memories to follow next month.

Every Space A Garden - Balcony Gardening - Chris Collins Head of Horticulture Garden Organic

I think people sometimes feel that gardening is the pastime of particular sections of society, those with ownership of large spaces, more economic freedoms and of course the all-important ingredient of all, time. Changes in many peoples personal living spaces may inhibit peoples urge to grow and nurture plants. It is though quite simply not true, a pot, hanging basket, windowsill, balcony, or roof terrace no matter how small allow you to green up your environment, grow your own food or just simply bring colour into your life.

To start always think of any outdoor space as a cube as opposed to being flat. For instance, a 2-meter square garden massively increases in size if the thought of a cubed space. Adding trellis, hanging baskets, wall baskets, why not a metal archway or obelisks. Containers of varying heights and sizes will all help fill out what looks like a small unkept space into a magnificent garden.

It, therefore, follows that you get all your structural elements in place, take time to choose the pots and features you want. Look at upcycling, what can you recycle. If you are lucky enough to have a balcony, it is a good idea to take a piece of paper and a pen and just sketch out what you have in mind. It never hurts to plan out your garden no matter how small.

To be a successful container gardener rule one is to make sure you have decent soil. None of this three bags for a tenner from the DIY store, this type of compost is good for mulching, but you want your plant roots to be in a decent potting compost, spending a few pennies extra on compost will pay dividends to in the long run. Perennial planting in containers can be top-dressed with compost each year and seasonal containers and baskets can have their soil replaced by a third each season.

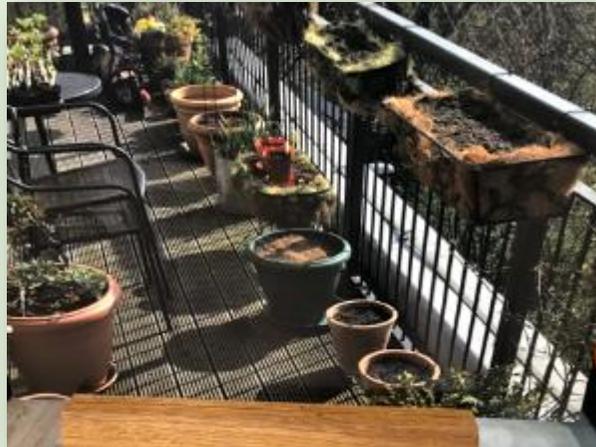
So now the exciting part, what do you want to grow? I make the most of small spaces by mixing plant types, I have structural containers that are perennial and create the outline of the balcony. Old English Roses make great balcony plants and I train these on the walls and underplant with Lavender. Woody herbs such as Rosemary, Thyme & Oregano make a good perennial pot and also contribute to the kitchen. Finally, a decent climbing plant, planted on railings will not only look good and has a hedging effect by slowing down wind speed as it matures. For this a winter Jasmine is excellent. To get the most out of a small space nothing quite gives you your maximum results than seasonal planting. In mid-May I fill my balcony with all the old summer bedding stalwarts, from the Petunia to the Pelargonium blended with trailing

Lobelia & Impatiens, these plants will cover themselves in flower from June through to autumns the first frosts. They are the plants that just keep on giving. Once they come to pass it is time to fill the containers & baskets with bulbs.

A mixture of Snowdrops, Crocus, Narcissus, Tulips & Allium will produce months of colour from February until May bringing your seasonal planting full cycle.



In among this all this colour a small space filled with containers can produce a steady supply of fresh organic food just meters from your kitchen table. Quick crops that can be grazed are particularly successful. Grow these in close lines (drills) in a large trough, try to get one that has a reservoir built into its base. This means the soil will draw up water by capillary action and lessen the chances of the plants drying out. Sow quick crops like cut and come again Salad leaves, Lettuce, Rocket, perpetual Spinach. Sow them densely so they produce lots of small juicy leaves that can be picked at will and added straight to a salad. It is also good to



practise to sow new crops in between your previously sown drill as these can take over as the older plants expire . Site your trough in a sunny spot where possible. Tomatoes, Aubergines, Peppers and Chilis make great veg to grow in containers, they can be mixed with leafy herbs and seasonal bedding or pollinator plants to make 'pottage' containers. Plant out in mid to late May and by late July you can begin picking.



To have a healthy successful balcony garden is not so difficult but there are a few important rules to follow. It may seem obvious but rule one and most fundamental is attention to watering, the simple art of irrigation is the catalysts to all the other gardening tasks. Do it early in the morning before heading off to work, always water your containers one by one, water deep, give them a decent drink right to the base of the plants. Whilst doing this check how your plants are doing, do they need picking over, deadheading? Have they got any unwanted visitors that need picking off? Do they need any physical support? Watering and all the other considerations that come with it is the job that gives you skin in the game, you will see your plants grow and your garden flourish and the fine art of horticulture will become part you.

Our last considerations for our container plants is making sure they get their nutrients. Container soil will leach nutrients, they will wash through over time, so the gardener needs to supplement them. Organic comfrey pellets are a well-balanced fertiliser and can be added to the pots in spring and then again in mid-summer Along with a thin dressing of compost or organic matter. A regular foliar feed of diluted seaweed extract sprayed on to the leaves little and often will keep your plants healthy and strong. Do this early in the morning on a still day. A great advantage to balcony gardens is pest and disease is usually minimal. Encourage Hoverflies and small birds to control the caterpillars and Aphids and pick over any mouldy looking or unwell looking leaves. With this mixture of planting from herbs, edibles & flower will create a good balanced organic garden

Gardening is not about size It is just about getting your hands in the soil and connecting with nature so have a look at any space you have and help green our cities, towns, and villages.

Keep the spirit of Britain in Bloom alive - A message from Patience Atkinson-Gregory of Amberol



One of the reasons that we love working with Britain in Bloom groups is the amazing support and camaraderie that exists – even between groups competing in the same category. This sense of community and togetherness is the heart and soul of the competition.

However, the In-Bloom community has been tested by the difficult challenges thrown up by Covid-19. I think it is true to say that although we all appreciate the need for such measures, the way that communities, friends, and families have been kept apart has been one of the hardest trials for us all. However, we have been heartened to hear about many stories of people working to support each other in these unprecedented times.

As people committed to making Britain more beautiful, In Bloom groups play such an important part in the mental health and wellbeing of their communities. Now more than ever, we need to take heart from the beauty that is all around us. One of the benefits of this awful situation has been the opportunity to

take more time to appreciate what is in front of us.

The floral displays and improvement initiatives that In Bloom groups work so hard to create are more important than ever, particularly in towns and cities. And for people with no outside space of their own, having access to green spaces and plants and flowers in communal places is essential. At a time when it is so easy to be negative, seeing plants and flowers in bloom during daily exercise is a massive mood-booster.

And we are not the only ones who think so. Spending time in green spaces is a proven way of improving mental health and wellbeing. Gardening and horticulture have even been recognised by the NHS as part of their social prescribing programme, highlighting the significant physical and mental health benefits that horticulture can offer.

Of course, lockdown and social distancing have thrown up difficult challenges for the In-Bloom community. We hope that by reducing the need for maintenance and watering visits, Amberol's self-watering planters can help mitigate some of those challenges. And because our containers enable plants continuous access to water and nutrients as and when needed, they also help to ensure optimal growth – particularly important if you are not able to tend to display as often as you would like.

While the usual planting programme will be curtailed for most groups, we have been encouraged to hear that many In Bloom groups are now beginning to find ways to work safely with social distancing measures in place to protect themselves and the public who benefit so much from your work. And more good news: we are delighted that after a short hiatus to ensure that there were appropriate health and safety measures in place, the Amberol factory is now open again. This means that we can fulfil orders as usual – and help you make a difference to health and wellbeing by spreading some floral colour this season. So, if you have any questions about any of our self-watering planters, litter bins, benches, or picnic tables, do get in touch. We are always happy to offer advice or take orders to get Britain blooming again. Good luck and stay safe. For more information about Amberol's self-watering planters, visit www.amberol.co.uk, email sales@amberol.co.uk or call 01773 830 930.

Boswell Road Lockdown continued....

I thought I would write an update regarding the seeds I planted during lockdown. The hollyhocks did not come to anything, but I have never grown them before so probably did something wrong. The forget-me-nots showed promise until I forgot to water them! Luckily, I have a second packet so will try again by sprinkling them directly in the ground for flowers next year. The little stick seeds germinated and began sprouting tiny leaves which a slug promptly enjoyed for supper! However, the sweet peas have done well and are about to be planted in a large pot so that they will hopefully adorn the side of a shed, the annual flowers are about to burst into bloom and the salad leaves have been a great success. I reckon every seed germinated and I ended up pricking them out into other pots to give some away. We have had one crop already and the second is just about ready to munch on. My spider houseplant had produced loads of babies so when potted up were put on a table outside my house, along with some pots of Alchemilla mollis for neighbours and passers-by to take away.

A lot more baking has taken place, but it is slowing down as the kitchen currently gets too hot and baking ingredients are proving hard to come by. However, I seem to have a lot of icing sugar so will attempt some peppermint or orange creams for a change, providing I can spare an egg white! Who would have thought that these strange times would start with mass purchasing of toilet rolls and end up with empty baking product shelves?

With little rain lately we do not yet know if the drainage channel has worked to alleviate the collection of water, but I am not complaining about the sunshine. (My back has also recovered). Several neighbours have reported good growth of their sunflowers and a family gave me theirs to continue tending. All was well until the freaky hailstones last week which broke said the plant in two. I have not seen them to deliver the bad news but a couple of the spare seeds I had kept were hastily planted and are progressing well as substitutes.

The trail camera has only spotted our local fox and some early riser pigeons. Not sure which of these are enjoying the little pot of dog food we are leaving out occasionally for our prickly friend as the camera always seems to be facing the wrong way. It also missed recording a 'thief' in the darkness when one morning we discovered that a large suet ball had come loose from its hanger and was found wedged in one of the hedgehog highways cut into our fence. A flash of brown fur was seen through the gap having a nibble so we deduced that we've either got a fox who cannot jump fences with his mouth full or a 'super' rat/mouse with amazing muscles!

The blue tit nesting box was being visited regularly and eventually, about 3 weeks ago, faint cheeping could be heard. We kept away as much as possible to allow the babies to be fed unhindered and viewed from inside the house. It was not until a local moggy was spotted sitting on the shed ogling the proceedings that we thought the nest could be in trouble and after that, we saw little comings and goings of the adult birds. After about a week with no sightings, we decided to take a look inside and found to our huge disappointment that the box must have been abandoned as the beautifully constructed nest held 5 little bodies and one unhatched egg. It is very upsetting, but we have cleaned out and disinfected the box and will keep our fingers crossed that more birds would consider it to be their temporary home in the future. We will never know if the adults got predated, possibly by the local sparrow hawk, or were simply inexperienced parents frightened off by fur and whiskers.

On a more positive note, we have been privileged to see young goldfinches, starlings and sparrows being fed with various seeds from our feeders. We have also had great fun sinking a washing up bowl to make a little wildlife pond, complete with a 'sail' which stops the dead bits of fir tree above falling into it. A previous attempt at a pond using the cut off the bottom of an old water butt did not work but a frog had nevertheless been enjoying the damp muck in the bottom. It moved into the new one seamlessly and has not been put off by the very cheesy fishing gnome wearing socks and flip flops that I could not resist!

It is so amazing how a small garden in a built-up area can provide habitat for a good amount of wildlife. Our supply of nest boxes, feeding stations, plants and a little bit of water seems to be appealing, even if we must endure failures alongside successes. And as for the housework situation....well that is another story!!!

Growing Courgettes – Vertically - Barry Newman NDH, FNVS - Vice Chairman of the RHS Fruit, Vegetable and Herb Committee

Although not everyone's favourite, the humble courgette seems to be enjoying increasing popularity. If the number of new varieties available and seed sales is an indicator, the whole Cucurbit family is enjoying quite a renaissance in the kitchen garden.



If you are thinking of growing this versatile vegetable can I share with you my method of growing which has proved successful? It simply involves growing vertically using supports and keeping them regularly tied.

Gardening in Sussex, for me the process starts in May once we are free of frosts. For those gardening further north, it may be sensible to wait until later in the month when air temperatures are higher. Courgettes like their cousin's Squashes, Marrows and Pumpkins do not like low temperatures or high night/day differentials.

I have found that some varieties respond better to this method of growing than others. For me, **Venus** and **Defender** are and continue to be excellent performers in terms of taste and habit, and both enjoy the Societies Award of Garden Merit.

Whilst I raise my plants, I am encouraged to see that these two varieties are generally stocked by garden centres, so a timely start can be made by those who do not have the benefit of a glasshouse or heated protection. Always grow or buy a spare just in case!

The ground should be well manured and fertilised as both nutrient and water holding capacity are particularly important. Courgettes are quick growers with large leaves so attention to watering is particularly important.

The method of growing is quite simple, firstly knock your stake into the ground making sure it is firm and capable of holding what will be a considerable amount of foliage. I suggest a 1.8 metre round tree stake is the most appropriate. Whilst container growing can work, the container needs to be substantial as does the method of securing the stake. Once the stake is in, the courgette should be planted as close to the stake as possible. If growing more than one plant, position about 1.2m apart. There is no tying at this stage, but it may be advisable to prop a sheet of glass on the windward side to give some initial protection. Once established the protection can be removed. The plants should then begin to trail, and the process of tying can start. Gently lift the trailing stem and secure it to the stake, the secret is to use soft, thick ties, loosely tied in order not to damage the hollow stems. I have found that as the courgette grows a tie every four or five inches is sufficient to keep it upright and supported by the stake.

Courgettes readily adapt to being grown upright and the method is advantageous in many ways.

Firstly, the plant takes up less space with the leaves, flowers and fruit kept clear of the ground and consequently free from ground splash, detritus, and pests. Secondly, I believe a plant grown vertically tends to be more vigorous and structurally balanced. Additionally, and importantly the fruits are borne freely, in open light and form quickly and evenly. Another useful benefit is that when maturing the bottom leaves can easily be removed and the plant watered without getting the foliage wet, thus delaying, and sometimes eradicating, the inevitable mildew. In the rare possibility that a side shoot appears, it can easily be removed with a sharp knife, but I have never found this necessary.

Using the vertical method, I have also lengthened the growing season. It seems that with their heads in the air, they are persuaded to fruit longer sometimes right into October and November if free of frosts.

Give it a try, you will not be disappointed.

Barry is a former Chairman of the National Vegetable Society and a committed allotmenteer.



We say Goodbye to two Bloom Friends - Kenwyn Francis Rowarth Pearson FCIHort Dip Hort Kew Plantsman and Horticulturist - 6th May 1952 – 23rd May 2020

After completing his formal education at Cawston College in Norfolk and his initial horticultural training at the Norfolk School of Horticulture, Kenwyn started his career as an apprentice with Laxton and Bunyard nurseries. Work there included staging and staffing the stand at Chelsea flower show. 1971 saw him move to Lancashire College of Agriculture at Myerscough to undertake the National Certificate in Horticulture, whilst there he participated in a range of student organisations. The big move came in 1972 when he started on the Kew Diploma course at the Royal Botanical Gardens Kew. Again, participation with the student's union, fete committee, student newsletter and Kew Club were some of the many ways he helped with student life. At the gardens, he achieved qualifications and a high standard of horticultural education. He is also fondly remembered for organising and cooking a Christmas day meal for the staff. The successful event saw meal portions being transported around the gardens from various mess rooms, under the coordination of Kenwyn. All the staff working that Christmas had an excellent lunch. Having completed the diploma course, he continued to work at Kew, until gaining employment with Milton Keynes New Town Development Corporation. He worked in the landscape section assisting in the planting and green structure that eventually became Milton Keynes, with some wooded areas now, of course, being mature woodland.



In 1978 he was appointed to the position of Head Gardener to the Cadogan Estate in central London, this involved the modernisation, mechanisation, maintenance, and development of many gardens with a variety of sizes and issues. For example, the garden in Sloane Street was above an underground car park, rather limiting plant choice. Dutch Elm Disease and the Great Storm of 1987 resulted in the estate losing many mature trees and needing his judgement as to what was safe or what needed urgent attention.

After leaving Cadogan he became a professional consultant and worked with local authorities and many clients with private gardens up and down the country, advising on redevelopment and maintenance. He also became an inspector for City and Guilds and Edexcel looking after standards in Horticultural education. During this period, he became a Liveryman with the Worshipful Company of Gardeners and a Freeman of the City of London. Regrettably, ill health forced him to give up work in 2005, and there followed nearly fifteen years of ill health concluding with him living in a nursing home near Horsham and eventually losing the ability to communicate. He died of a stroke aged 68 years.

Kenwyn dedicated his spare time to a wide range of horticultural organisations, he was a constant supporter of Perennial from when the Kew student fate supported the then Gardeners Royal Benevolent Society, becoming a Trustee and Vice-Chairman as well as Director of GRBS Enterprises. He was a founding member of the Professional Gardener's Guild with whom he also helped found the PG Trust. He was Vice Chairman/Director of Plant Heritage (then known as NCCPG) from 1988-1995, Secretary to the Kew Guild (1994-1999) and vice president in 1998. As a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Horticulture, he served as a Council member from 1991 to 1997. He was a Bloom judge for London in Bloom (Trustee 1997), The London Gardens Society, South and South East in Bloom and a committee member of London Metropolitan Gardens Society. He also served as a moderator for the RHS exams in 2003 and was part of the review panel of the RHS MHort in 1993. Kenwyn took his mischievous sense of humour to all situations and loved to socialise. His parties during Chelsea week were legendary and all who came to know him would attest that they have all lost a great friend and colleague. Due to the current Covid-19 situation, a funeral is uncertain. Kenwyn will eventually be laid to rest in the family plot in Ribchester, Lancashire

Our sincere sympathies go out to his friends

Antionette (Toni) Assirati BSc DipHE DMS FRSA



It is with sadness that we report the untimely death of London in Bloom judge Toni Assirati, who died peacefully on Monday 4th May 2020 following a short illness.

Toni joined The Royal Parks in 2004 as Head of Education and Community Engagement working across all its parks on a wide range of horticultural, community, volunteer, and education projects. Her portfolio included developing our Guided Walks Programme, working on various play schemes, developing the Volunteer Strategy, and her involvement with the Isabella Plantation Access project, among many. In 2007 I had the privilege of working closely with Toni, in partnership with the Cabinet War Rooms (CWR), when we installed our Dig for Victory Allotment in St James's Park. Toni created and managed a full-time education post for schools learning, and in conjunction with the CWR wrote and produced the first-ever Teacher's Pack for Allotment Gardening in schools. Initially, a one-year project it was such a success that it ran for 3 years including a birthday visit by Their Royal Highnesses the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall. Toni was forever wanting to involve children and young people and I recall the enjoyment that was had at all of the Harvest festivals that Toni arranged, which later extended to the allotment at Kensington Gardens and Dwarf Orchard in Greenwich Park. My suggestion one year of us conducting a Halloween event resulted in the hollowing and carving of over 200 pumpkins before displaying them, all lit, across St James's Park together with a host of ghoulish activities! When I asked Toni if she would become a London in Bloom judge she was initially reticent saying that she did not have the horticultural knowledge. However, the shift in direction to a community-led campaign and the newly created 'It's Your Neighbourhood' scheme made her an ideal candidate. Toni was a natural for the role with her talent for talking to people of all backgrounds, and she enjoyed her involvement, given much-valued feedback to entries on how they could benefit from their schemes, and occasionally telling the committee what to do also! As well as being a LIB judge and her involvement with several other organisations, she was a Council member of the London Children's Flower Society.

The most recent projects on which we worked together were the highly successful Artist in Residence project in St James's Park entitled a 'Right Royal Buzz', and an audio tour of the Park, which sadly remains unfinished. I, together with other colleagues continued to see Toni after she retired from The Royal Parks, our final get-together being a visit to Gunnersbury Park and Museum last year. Toni had been looking forward to moving back to Dorset to spend her retirement years in a part of the country she loved, before being taken poorly in February this year. In April she was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour and died just 12 days later, sharing her final days in the company of her family, talking, laughing, reminiscing, and enjoying the memories. I and her many friends and colleagues will fondly remember her warmth, energy, infectious enthusiasm, and her love of life.

She will be dearly missed, and our thoughts go out to her family and friends. Mark Wasilewski – Co-Chairman London in Bloom, Parks Manager St James's Park

Gardening Tips & Tasks for June

At the time of writing the Lock-Down has begun to ease but restrictions are still in place, but I know this will not stop you all continuing to do the fantastic work you do in your communities whilst observing the social distancing and hygiene rules.

Bedding Plants:

Before planting out your bedding plants dunk the pots and containers into water to ensure the roots are well watered before planting. If the soil in your bed or border is dry it is a good idea to water it well the day before planting.

If you sowed half-hardy annuals earlier in the year indoors, harden them off now if you have not already so and plant them out. If you sowed hardy annuals directly into beds and borders, thin them out perhaps planting some into another area of the garden, or pots and containers. Also, consider giving or swapping with friends or neighbours. Text them beforehand and leave the plants by their gate or front door to maintain social distancing.

Beds & Borders:

Hoe regularly to control weeds, especially those quick-growing annuals. In dry warm weather hoe off the weeds, leave them on the soil to let the sunburn them off.

A little tip: When weeding, work your way along the bed or border in one direction and then turn around and work back the other way. It is surprising how many weeds you can miss if you do not work in both directions!

Deadhead early flowering herbaceous and perennial plants as this can help produce a second flush of flowers later on. Check on stakes and ties to stop them flopping over.

There's still time to sow annuals directly into the soil. Try sowing some old favourites such as Clarkia, Godetia, Cornflower and Nasturtiums.

Pruning:

Cut back early spring flowering shrubs such as Weigela and Deutzia once they have finished flowering to encourage new growth for next year's flowers. Cut out the oldest wood to ground level to encourage new growth from the base. Pruning shrubs after flowering also helps to control their size, particularly as many of us have small gardens.

Cut back the early flowering clematis too if you never got around to it last month.

Climbers:

Climbing and rambling roses should have new shoots tied in regularly and other rampant growers such as honeysuckle need to be kept under control. Deadhead roses regularly, to encourage further blooms.

Hanging Baskets:

These can be put out now once hardened off and make sure they are watered regularly. To keep bedding plants flowering well and long into the season, regularly feed and deadhead as flowers start to fade. When hanging up your baskets make sure the brackets and chains are safe and secure and not positioned where someone can knock their head on them! Also keep a check on the ground beneath the basket, as this is where weeds will thrive, from the dripping basket.

Containers:

As with hanging baskets, remove fading flowers and water and feed frequently. Containers will always dry out quicker than the soil in beds and borders so check regularly. Check also for vine weevil larvae that can thrive in containers.

Lawns & Meadows:

Try to mow once a week. Feed with a high nitrogen fertiliser to keep the lawn looking green. Trim up the edges to the lawn at the same frequency as mowing. A well-kept lawn always enhances the look of a garden.

If you have a wildflower meadow for a lawn – great for butterflies and other beneficial insects - do not feed it, as wildflowers prefer poor soil.

Water conservation:

If you do not already do so, once the Lock-Down has ended consider purchasing water butts to collect rainwater from your house, garage, and sheds. Other ways to conserve water is to line out trickle irrigation hosepipes around the garden placing the small nozzles in the pipe at the base of the plants so the water goes where it is needed. You could also add a timer so that the water only comes on at night – when less water is lost through evaporation. You can also use ‘grey water’ that you have used in the house for plants, BUT do not use water that has cleaning chemicals in it. However, you water, make sure you do it often in the hottest weather, but best after sundown. However, do not overwater, as you want to encourage the roots to get down into the soil and search out water for themselves.

Use the Lock-Down time to consider future ways of watering such as the ideas above to reduce waste and to minimise the use of mains water.

Bird Feeders:

Invite birds into your garden by hanging up feeders in trees and other high spots out the way of cats. Encouraging birds into your garden brings an added interest and of course, they can provide other benefits – pest control of aphid, slugs, and snails.

Do not forget:

- Hoe beds and borders regularly to prevent emerging weeds from flowering and seeding, especially chickweed, shepherds purse and groundsel.
- Keep hedges in check and trim as required.
- Regularly check for aphids, blackfly, black spot and mildew on your roses and other susceptible plants. Only spray if necessary. Healthy well-fed plants can reduce such problems and therefore reduce the need for chemicals.
- Also keep a lookout for slugs and snails, giving extra protection to the most susceptible plants such as Hosta's. To protect potted plants stand them off the ground on terracotta legs that have been coated with petroleum jelly.
- Above all keep safe and perhaps consider planning and organising a ‘flower-themed’ event in your community when the Lock-Down finally ends.

Dahlias – Paul Dalby – South & South East in Bloom Judge

With the threat of frost long gone most tender perennials and half-hardy annuals will have been planted but if you have a few spaces to fill D.I.Y stores and garden centres still have dahlia tubers at bargain prices. From perfectly globular pompons through tennis ball-sized miniatures to dinner plate-sized giants, as well as single-flowered and collarettes that are irresistible to pollen seeking insects. There is an enormous range of flower colour, except blue, and the foliage can vary from pale green through bronze to almost purple.

Dahlias tubers can be planted now and will flower in late summer and given a little care and attention good quality blooms will be available for cutting and garden decoration up until the first frost of autumn. They like to have plenty of food and water, before planting the tubers the addition of well-rotted manure or compost and a dressing of general fertiliser will get the plants off to a good start. Once planted the tubers will grow away quickly, the young shoots are a delicacy for slugs, so they need to be protected by whatever is your preferred method of slug control. When planting put in a strong stake for tying the plant to later.



As the plants grow they will develop buds at the tip of each stem, these crown buds should be removed to encourage further shoots to develop from the stem and below ground. At the same time, the plant should be loosely tied to the stake. To improve the quality of the blooms the number of developing shoots or breaks should be limited except for pompons, whereas many flowers as possible should be encouraged, miniatures 12 – 16, small 8 – 10, medium, 6 -8 and giants 4.

After the crown buds have been removed the plants will put on a spurt of growth and should be fed weekly with a general-purpose fertiliser and attention paid to the arrival of any pests, aphids are particularly attracted to the lush growing tips. Any unwanted breaks and branches should be removed, and the plants tied into the stakes every 18” (450 mm), to prevent wind damage.

When buds appear at the end of the branches it is time to change the weekly feed to a high potash feed (tomato feed is ideal). As the flower buds grow there will be two or sometimes three small buds immediately behind it. To enable the flower to develop to its full potential these ‘wing’ buds should be removed. To ensure a long straight stem for cut flowers any developing shoots or buds should be pinched out of the two pairs of leaf axils below the flower

bud. Further flowering shoots will develop from lower down, cutting flowers and deadheading will encourage flowering to continue until the first frosts.

Just a word about earwigs: Earwigs do like to have a munch of dahlias florets which can spoil the look particularly of single-flowered varieties. Earwigs spend their days hiding in the foliage or the depths of the florets of double flowers coming out at night to wreak havoc. The thought of an earwig leaping out of a flower and scurrying across the kitchen floor is enough to put some people off growing dahlias. Controlling earwigs is difficult but they can be discouraged from attacking the flowers by putting a small dab of petroleum jelly on the stem about 6” (150 mm) below the bud.

Amongst the great variety of forms, colours and sizes there will a dahlia or maybe several that will be ideal to fill that gap and will reward you with a wealth of flowers for the vase or just to look great in the garden.

Growing with and for our Community – Chiswick House and Gardens Trust Geraldine King Estate Garden Manager

The last three months have been challenging for many of us in the parks and gardens industry. At the Trust, we furloughed our office and house team. Our events and finance teams are working from home and presence on the estate is provided by the Gardeners, three Gavin Jones staff, the Ranger, the Director, and myself. As with you all no doubt we have changed how we operate. Many of our partnership events such as Gifford's Circus, weddings and community open days have been postponed or cancelled. This has resulted in a shortfall of £500,000 in income received and desperately needed to manage the Estate. We have launched a fundraising campaign and you can go to chiswickhouseandgardens.org.uk/donate

The Trust relies on approximately 150 volunteers to assist with maintaining the gardens, providing House and Gardens tours and community events throughout the year. We are very much missing their endeavours not to mention the entertainment and company that they provide when working alongside us. I am very grateful to our four bee-keeping volunteers who attend daily on a rotational basis to look after our bees. Thankfully, the bees have been behaving and we have only had to deal with two swarms from 8 hives with approximately 50,000 bees in each.

Open spaces have been identified as being significantly important during lockdown, providing areas for exercise and fresh air and, as with you all, this has proved challenging with minimal resources. One challenge for the Trust was what we would do with our three-acre Kitchen Garden.

The Trust, in addition to income from events, also receive funding from English Heritage and Hounslow Council. The council have set up a community food hub and approached the Trust for assistance with providing fresh food for 400 residents who are most at risk and self-isolating. Although we had planned our growing program for the year to include educational and unusual vegetables, we implemented a basic growing program to cater to as many of the community as we could.

Together Gavin Jones and the gardening team on Thursday mornings start at 6.45 am to harvest the vegetables and fruit that are in season, for the Hounslow Food Hub. Collections are at 10.00 am so it is a full-on operation. To date we have been provided 1075 stems of rhubarb, along with 790 bunches of spinach, 2136 chard leaves, 221 mixed salad leaves bags (49kg), artichokes, 175 bunches of radishes (20kg) and 210 asparagus stems. Fortunately, we have two glasshouses which allow us to speed up the growth of crops. At present we have 63 tomato plants under glass about to produce fruit and another 72 tomato plants in the Kitchen Garden.

We rent out a glasshouse to a local Michelin star restaurant - La Trompette on Chiswick High Road. As the restaurant has closed Rob the proprietor kindly agreed that the team could harvest his vegetables for the food bank. Also, he has supplied loaves of sourdough with the flour he has leftover.





We are appreciative that some people may have no idea of how to prepare or cook some of the vegetables we are providing and so jointly, to promote the Trust and La Trompette. we provide recipe cards with all of the vegetables we supply. The Kitchen Garden has approximately one acre of cut flowers not to mention everything else florally available to us from the wider estate. To cheer people up we also provide cut flowers and have supplied 550 bunches to date.

Every Thursday we are joined by the 55th Mayor of Hounslow Councillor Tony Louki to assist with harvesting along with our Director Xanthe Arvanitakis. We are definitely all in this together. The team and I are delighted that we can provide for the community during these unprecedented times. Happy growing and stay safe.

Biological control in the garden

Pest controls are used by professional growers to protect their crops on a large scale, the same pest controls can be used by the home gardener too, but how do they work? Neil Helyer (FARGRO) explains how biological control in the garden works and how it could benefit you.

The majority of plants may suffer from pest or disease outbreaks at some time or other. At this time of year, aphids are particularly troublesome outdoors while whitefly and spider mites may be found in greenhouses. All these, and most other pests, can be managed biologically as part of an integrated pest management strategy. IPM is regarded as a more sustainable method of pest control and is the main strategy used by commercial growers in the UK and most countries around the world.



IPM brings together all aspects of pest and disease control; initially using cultural techniques such as general hygiene, ground cover materials for weed control and monitoring with sticky traps to predict pest occurrence. Biological control becomes the next line of defence either by introducing beneficial organisms or as a consequence of reduced pesticide applications, allowing natural pest control organisms to establish. Pesticide use, particularly with selective products should be used only when necessary, as a guide, it is best to use a pesticide when pests can be seen on a plant or when leaf or yield damage is evident. By using a short persistent or selective pesticide to reduce an existing pest population, natural enemies can be introduced, usually within a few days, to maintain the control. Biological control always works best when pest numbers and plant damage are low. SB Plant Invigorator is a contact acting, physical control spray for aphids, spider mites, adult whitefly etc. It has no harvest interval and can be used on all edible and ornamental plants, protected (greenhouse) and outdoors and can be used as a targeted spray with minimal effect on biological control organisms.

Biological control is the use of natural enemies of pest organisms and has several advantages over conventional crop spraying. Beneficial organisms locate the host by their mobility, often following soon after the pest arrived. Obviously, with natural pest control, the pest organisms must be present on plants before the beneficial arrive as they are the food for the parasitoids and predators. The trick is allowing sufficient pest numbers to encourage the beneficial without causing undue damage to the plants; this is where sprays such as SB Plant Invigorator are very useful.

Pea aphids (*Acyrtosiphon pisum*) before and after a single spray with SB Plant Invigorator, this natural spray is safe to the majority of beneficial organisms.



Aphids, also known as greenfly and blackfly are common from April onwards, but ladybird activity does not occur until mid to late May, naturally occurring parasitoid wasps that kill individual aphids are usually active from early May. Lacewing adults start to lay their eggs from mid-May, their larvae devour most soft-bodied prey and can be found in gardens, hedges, and greenhouses. All these naturally occurring beneficial insects can be introduced to your garden and greenhouse, where they can establish a breeding population to maintain pest control throughout the summer and well into autumn. Most aphids have more than one main host plant, the quite common and troublesome Black-Bean aphid (*Aphis fabae*) attacks beans but can also be found in greenhouses on cucumber and many ornamentals. This particular species over-winters on Euonymus, Philadelphus and Viburnum; it is well worth



introducing lacewing larvae to these plants in early to mid-April to reduce the number attacking your beans. Lacewing larvae are voracious feeders of most soft-bodied prey and can be used in greenhouses and gardens. Other biocontrols for aphids include specific parasitoid wasps that attack individual aphids, laying an egg inside each aphid that develops to a larva, eventually killing the host and emerging as a small fly that finds further aphids. A predatory midge called *Aphidoletes aphidimyza* lays its eggs close to aphid colonies, a minute orange coloured larva hatches and starts to feed on the aphids. These orange larvae eventually grow to 3 mm in length before dropping to the ground where they form a cocoon in which they pupate, new adults emerge after 2 to 3 weeks and the cycle continues. This predator can establish in gardens to reappear each year and provide excellent, natural biocontrol.

Parasitoid wasp about to insert an egg into an aphid. Orange larvae of the gall midge *Aphidoletes aphidimyza* feeding on aphids, this beneficial predator attacks aphid colonies.



Pests like spider mites are encouraged by hot weather and may be found at this time of year in greenhouses and from mid-summer outdoors, particularly on cucumber, raspberries and strawberries, runner beans and many ornamentals. The glasshouse spider mite over-winters away from plants, frequently within cracks and crevasses of the greenhouse structure and inside hollow bamboo canes. They feed by sucking the sap from individual plant cells leaving a fine speckled appearance that can coalesce to leave bleached leaves that eventually die and turn crispy brown. This pest is best controlled by the orange / red predatory mite *Phytoseiulus persimilis* which actively seeks its prey, piercing and sucking all stages of spider mites. They can be used from late April to early October, the late-season introductions are particularly useful as the predator will continue feeding on mites as they start to hide away for winter.

If you would like to learn more about the biological pest control range that The Garden Superstore can offer, visit our website to find one that best fits your needs.

Our entire range is affordable and effective, giving your garden and greenhouse the best chance to flourish without any pesky pests getting in the way.

Visit the range: <https://www.thegardensuperstore.co.uk/organic-pest-control>

Ryde seafront will once again be blooming this summer — thanks to the efforts of volunteer planters.



Determined coronavirus (Covid-19) would not sap the colour from the floral displays, a team of around 20 helpers rolled up their sleeves and set about planting up the summer beds.

With fewer seasonal staff available in time to support the planting, which is funded by Ryde Town Council, a call went out for green-fingered volunteers to get their hands dirty.

Councillor John Hobart, a Cabinet member for heritage and the environment, said: "Knowing how important this feature is to the town, we asked for help from local community volunteers and staff on our redeployment list to spend some time on Tuesday to start the project.

"The team were briefed on the strict social distancing and PPE rules.

The project has proved to be a great success — with the planting completed with helpers delighted and proud they could help.

We would like to thank everyone who very kindly gave up their time."

The volunteer effort was coordinated by Mike Fitt, a South and South East in Bloom judge and adviser to Wight In Bloom.

Mike said: "Since Victorian times Ryde seafront has been noted for its floral displays and with the help of neighbours, volunteers from Monkton Arts, council staff on redeployment and supported by grounds maintenance contractor John O'Conner, that horticultural tradition was maintained and Ryde Esplanade will be looking 'blooming beautiful' once again this year.

A big thank you to everyone who answered the call to help out, despite the challenging times we are all going through.

IW councillor for Ryde East and town mayor, Councillor Michael Lilley, also thanked the volunteers for their hard work.

He said: "It has been difficult for the community through Covid-19, so to see the colourful beds and the community spirit behind their creation brings needed sunshine and messages of hope in our lives. Thank you to all involved."

Hever Castle Gardens Reopen - By Head Gardener, Neil Miller

After 70 days of closure due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19), Hever Castle & Gardens has welcomed the recent updates to Government guidelines that now allow private gardens to reopen. Our 125 acres of grounds and gardens to members and the public are now open.

The gardens at Hever Castle are home to an ever-changing display of wonderful plants and shrubs throughout the seasons. At present the roses are in full bloom, which is always particularly admired, are already providing a kaleidoscope of colour and wonderfully perfumed aromas.

Whilst the castle remains closed, we are delighted that we can welcome visitors back to our gardens and grounds. Lockdown has been a strange and challenging time for me working with such a small team to maintain the estate. I am a very social person and usually, away from my busy gardening schedule, I am providing garden tours to visitors and speaking at local events. This year, with the help of our marketing team, I have taken to sharing some planting advice and conducting virtual tours of the garden. You can find these all on our [YouTube](#) channel and [Facebook](#) and they'll be more to follow!

In my latest video, you can learn about the Hever Castle Iris which is on display in the gardens right now - <https://youtu.be/lxC9desw48k>

One big difference is that everyone will need to book a date and time slot online in advance (including Annual Members), this is to limit visitor numbers to help maintain social distancing.

In the initial period, the gardens, lake walk, and boating will be open. Toilet facilities will be available with additional measures in place for hygiene and social distancing.

Other open-air attractions including the water maze, archery and the play areas and takeaway food and drink service will follow as soon as possible. Meanwhile, indoor areas, like the castle, miniature model houses collection, military museum and garden exhibition will all remain closed.

We hope to welcome you to Hever Castle soon.

You can download high res images and the video from this Dropbox link (please credit Hever Castle & Gardens):

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/iybggik76k0eho6/AAA5htrTX4h1dA6x5PG9km9la?dl=0>



Coming Soon:

We hope you have found the articles in our Bloom Bulletin of interest and we are already preparing our July edition.

The July edition will include: The further adventures of a Bloom Judge, Bloom Judging in Europe, Starting new allotments and hopefully a few more articles from you our participants. If you would like to publish some of your efforts during the is time and particularly how Bloom has helped the local community please let us know.

In the meantime, we wish all of our Bloom friends best wishes for the year ahead and I speak for all of my colleagues, we look forward to visiting your Communities, Villages, Towns, Boroughs and Parks as soon as we can.

Stay safe and keep gardening.