

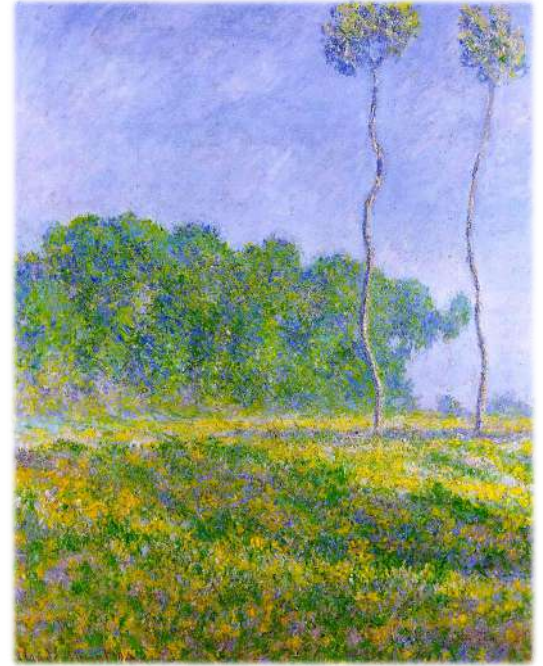
# The Grapevine

*Newsletter of the Finchley Horticultural Society*

SPRING 2023

*Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote  
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the roote,  
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,  
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;  
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth  
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth  
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne  
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,  
And smale fowles maken melodye,  
That slepen al the night with open ye,  
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages:  
Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages...*

*Opening lines of The Prelude to  
The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer  
(modern English translation below)*



Spring is back! It has been a long wait – the cold and the wet seemed to be a permanent fixture. The buds began to ‘relax and spread’ far too early, in December and beginning of January, but were beaten back by prolonged spells of cold weather in February and March so that quite a few of the more tender plants seemed to give up for good! But now the sun is shining again, the rain comes and goes in the form of traditional April showers, alternating with glorious blue skies. The birds are singing their hearts out. There is a strong urge to start planting as soon as possible, but we must proceed with some caution. Temperatures can still fluctuate a lot, and a late ground frost or a hail shower can wreak havoc with young tender shoots.

In this issue of the Grapevine we sum the work that has been going on over the winter, and look forward to the new growing year.

Poem in Modern English: When April with his sweet showers has pierced the drought of March to the root, and bathed the veins of every plant in such moisture that from its power the flowers grow; and when also Zephyrus, with his sweet breath, has inspired tender crops in every garden and heath, and the young Sun has run his half course in the Sign of the Ram, and the small birds make melodies, and sleep all night with open eyes—so Nature spurs them on to the depth of their beings—then folk long to go on pilgrimages....

# Topping up the raised beds

By Jo Cuttell



When the Allotment Committee decided that the soil in the raised beds at the bottom of the Gordon Road site needed topping up because the levels had dropped over the years, they weren't sure how they would achieve this. The problem was where to find the soil to top them up. They considered using the soil from one of the raised beds and storing wood clippings in that bed. The wood clippings would rot down to provide a good compost.

The solution came unexpectedly with the start of the construction of the new Piggery. The Committee had decided to turn the bark chippings area under the canopy into a paved area to make the Piggery safer and more pleasant when used for community events. The unforeseen result of this decision was that when the builders dug out the ground to put in the slabs they produced a lot of top soil. We estimated about 5 tons! The only problem with the soil was that it was full of rubbish: glass, rubble, metal wire, carpet and much more.



Thanks to a wonderful team of volunteers we were able to sift through the soil and take out all the rubbish leaving a nice layer of healthy top soil on the beds. Other helpers dug out the soil from the large bags by the log cabin and transported it to the beds. This was heavy work.

Overall, around 25 people came to clear the soil of debris on Sunday mornings over the last couple of months. We are extremely indebted to all of them. Especial thanks go to Rowena for bringing homemade sesame buns to keep us all going.



# Things to do this month

(as advised by Rocket Gardens and the RHS)

- Sow seed potatoes, particularly 'Earlies' which will do best being planted out now.
- Clean the greenhouse windows and polytunnels so that they let in maximum sunlight when you plant seedlings. Also keep an eye on greenhouse temperature and ventilation – keep air circulating on a warm day to avoid problems with seedlings.
- Get ready for chilly nights - whether you'll be using horticultural fleece or making cloches, it is best to be ready before your plants arrive so that if it is cold during the first few weeks, the plants can be protected.
- Remove unwanted suckers from the base of fruit trees – do not cut but pull them off as close to the roots as possible.
- Protect fruit tree blossom of plums, apricots, peaches and pears with horticultural fleece if frost is forecast. Remove during the day to allow access to pollinators.
- Sow courgette, pumpkin and squash seeds in small pots under cover.
- Sow beetroot, carrots, Swiss chard, lettuce, leeks, radish, turnip, spring onions and peas outdoors in well-prepared soil. Protect carrots from carrot fly with companion planting: strong smelling allium plants like onions, leeks, or chives near your carrots will help mask the carrot scent. A good way of doing this is to alternate rows of carrots with rows of onions. Alternatively, use insect mesh.
- Dandelions are an important source of spring food for emerging bees; leave them to flower, then remove seedheads to stop them spreading.



## No Mow

This year the RHS are urging people to join their Wild About Gardens Campaign by giving their lawnmower a rest this spring and summer. Lawns play an important role in preserving biodiversity in our gardens. Allowing your grass (and wildflowers such as buttercups, dandelions and daisies) to grow tall you provide an extra source of nectar and pollen for many insects, as well as a place for small creatures, hedgehogs, reptiles and amphibians to hide from predators. Even an uncut strip around the lawn's edge can create an important habitat for many species such as butterflies, grasshoppers, bumblebees, ants, grass spiders, and ground beetles that need the dense grass for nesting and overwintering.



# Winter Pruning Workshop

A group of plot holders followed Leslie Wertheimer of the London Orchard Project during the Apple and Pear Tree Pruning Workshop run on 5 February 2023.

Winter pruning of apple and pear trees is routinely carried out to stimulate root growth and encourage better fruiting. Plot holders considered examples of trees on the Gordon Road site and learned about the principle of the three Ds of pruning: removing dead, diseased or damaged shoots and branches first. The objective is to reduce the canopy by no more than 20%, because excessive pruning will stimulate the growth of vigorous, upright growing water shoots.

Following that, one should remove any crossing shoots that are rubbing together, trying to retain the better placed, outward facing ones, and cut out strong shoots growing towards the centre. Finally, downward growing branches low on the tree that receive little light and could cause obstruction should also be taken out. On larger, mature trees the excess height or overcrowding can be reduced by shortening larger branches by up to a third.

Leslie also demonstrated the correct tools to use for pruning and encouraged the FHS to invest in a good sturdy ladder that would greatly help with reaching higher branches on mature trees.



# Growing herbs

by *Shoko Higashitsushi*

Now is the season to start planting herbs, and they can be enjoyed throughout summer.

## **Mediterranean herbs: lavender, sage, oregano, marjoram, thyme**

It is a good idea to plant Mediterranean herbs together. Good combinations will result in a healthier harvest and a better taste.

These herbs grow in the same dry climate, so they grow well together in the same type of soil – dry - and have similar watering requirements - sparse. They should be covered with fleece or moved to a sheltered location during winter.



## **Oregano and marjoram**

- Choose a stable plant with good leaf colour
- Oregano is used in Greek and Italian dishes such as pizzas, salads, grilled fish and meats, soups and stews. Goes especially well with tomatoes and tomato-based foods.
- It can also be planted as an ornamental plant as it produces pretty pink flowers. Varieties such as golden oregano have a beautiful vibrant colour.
- Requires low maintenance, however, it spreads easily, so cut back occasionally if ground in borders or grow in a pot on its own.
- Marjoram resembles oregano but has a milder and sweeter flavour compared to

## Sage

- Choose a bushy plant with good scent
- Should be watered well before and after planting but does not require much watering once it has settled in the soil, as it prefers dry conditions.
- Sage goes well with meat dishes and can also be drunk as tea
- In addition to its aromatic properties, it is also known for its positive benefits for memory, gums and throat when you have a cold.

## Thyme

- Choose a plant with glossy leaves
- Like sage, it goes well with meat dishes.
- Another way to enjoy the scent of thyme is to infuse it in olive oil or wine vinegar and use it to dress salads.

## Water-loving herbs: basil, parsley, tarragon

Water-loving herbs such as basil, parsley and tarragon grow well together.

It is also a good idea to grow basil next to tomatoes to keep whitefly away.

- Basil should be watered whenever the soil appears dry and put in a sunny spot.
- Add fertiliser to boost growth – use animal manure or liquid fertiliser such as seaweed fertiliser.

## Basil varieties

- **Sweet basil:** most popular variety, with strongest fragrance and flavour
- **Purple basil:** similar flavour to sweet basil, but with purple leaves
- **Thai basil:** has a slightly liquorice-like flavour. There is also a type of Thai basil called Liquorice basil
- **Lemon basil:** has a mild lemony flavour. Goes well with fish
- **Holy basil:** has a slightly peppery flavour.

## Combinations to avoid

- Avoid growing dill next to lavender because it can attract pests which will harm lavender
- Fennel can affect the flavour of other plants nearby, so should be grown in separately from other plants
- Mints should be ideally grown in containers to avoid spreading and robbing other plants of nutrients.





# PLANT SALE

Our annual Plant Sale will take place on Sunday 14 May, 1-4 pm.

Over the past few months, many volunteers have been helping Christine Williams and Catherine Schmitt with a variety of tasks required to get the plants ready for May: from filling pots with compost and writing labels to sowing and growing on seedlings, watering, dividing and potting on perennials and much more. As a result, the plants are looking great and we have high hopes for a very successful event in May.



As always, we will need more volunteers to help on the day, too, with sign making, labelling stock, organising the raffle, and selling the plants, as well as serving and selling tea and cakes. We count on you!

# Announcements

## TRIP TO SISSINGHURST GARDENS AND HOLE PARK GARDEN

The long-awaited coach trip to Sissinghurst Gardens and Hole Park Garden is taking place on Friday 23rd June. The coach will leave Regent's Park Road at 9am and return at around 6pm.

The cost per person is:

FHS member: £33.00

Non-member: £35.00

Sissinghurst is a National Trust Property so any member can enter free. If you are not a member you will need to add a further £15.20 to your payment. The trip is now full but you can contact Judy Woollett at [finchleyhorticulturalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:finchleyhorticulturalsociety@gmail.com) to be put on the waiting list in case of a cancellation.

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## GROWING EXTRA

We are hoping to contribute excess produce to the local food bank again this year. If you are sowing seeds, buying plug plants etc. do remember to include a little extra!

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## DOLLIS BROOKERS

We have already written about the volunteer initiative to clean up Dollis Brook and its banks. The Dollis Brookers group gets together every 6 weeks for 1.5 -2 hours to go through a section of Dollis Brook and pick up plastic, glass, cans and other rubbish (from rusty old bicycles to shoes and supermarket trolleys). If you are concerned about the amount of litter around and in the brook, why not join us? It is a fantastic opportunity to meet like-minded people, do something useful for the environment and local community and get children involved.

The next litter pick is scheduled for Sunday 21 May, 10-12 am. We supply bags, holding hoops, litter pickers and gloves. If you want to join the group please contact Elena Cook - [yelenacook@hotmail.com](mailto:yelenacook@hotmail.com)

## PEAT FREE COMPOST

By Judy Woollett

Members are reminded that the Trading Hut is phasing out compost containing peat and that from next year the sale of all peat compost for amateur gardeners will be banned. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has also confirmed that by 2026 sales of peat for professional growers will be phased out as well, before being fully banned by 2030. An interesting article by Paul Simons in the Times recently explained that:

“Peatlands are increasingly seen as a crucial ally in the fight against climate change and need protection and restoration. Peatland plants such as sphagnum moss absorb carbon dioxide and turn it into food by photosynthesis. When the plant dies its remains do not decay in the acid waters that lack oxygen and so the dead vegetation turns into peat which stores the carbon and keeps it out of the atmosphere for thousands of years. But carbon storage only works if the peatland is kept healthy without being drained, dug up, burnt or otherwise abused. If the land becomes degraded the dead plants can decay and the carbon is released back into the atmosphere, and it then becomes a climate problem”.

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## BBQ

We will be holding a Summer BBQ this year. Watch out for the date next month.

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Member of the Barnet Federation of  
Allotment and Horticultural Societies  
Affiliated to the  
Royal Horticultural Society

## Events Diary

### RHS Winter Events:

**RHS Malvern Spring Festival**  
**11 May-14 May**  
Three Counties, Malvern

**RHS Chelsea Flower Show**  
**23 May-27 May**  
The Royal Hospital Chelsea

**RHS Botanical Art and Photography Show**  
**16 June-9 July**  
Saatchi Gallery, London

**RHS National Rhododendron Show**  
**22-23 April**  
RHS Garden Rosemoor

**Spring Plant Fair**  
**22-23 April**  
RHS Garden Hyde Hall

**Spring Craft and Design Fair**  
**27 April-1 May**  
RHS Garden Wisley

Look out for on-sale dates in the members' e-  
newsletter or visit [rhs.org.uk/shows](http://rhs.org.uk/shows)



### Newsletter

If you received a paper copy of this newsletter  
and are now able to receive it by e-mail, please  
inform Christine Williams,  
[finchleyhorticulturalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:finchleyhorticulturalsociety@gmail.com)  
This saves us time and money.

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