



## NEWS FROM THE SHED - JANUARY

**Welcome to 2021! May we all feel safer and healthier this year**

**In the Christmas edition, I promised that this month, we would be looking forward and backwards – inspired by the statue of Janus at Harold Peto's garden, Iford Manor.**

So, let's start with a look to the future. If one Googles **New Year Resolutions for Gardeners**, one gets approximately 243,000 results. Obviously implying that we gardeners have an awful lot we could resolve to do better in a new year. This is just one of those lists of suggestions.....

### **8 New Year's Resolutions for Gardeners**

- Join a gardening club.
- Plant at least one native plant.
- Install a bat house.
- Create a compost bin.
- Volunteer at a community garden.
- Leave grass clipping on your lawn and keep them out of the landfill.
- Try your hand at saving seeds for next year.
- Plant at least one flower for the bees.

Perhaps I should add my own resolution....spend less time Googling and do more weeding.

However, I visited an incredible garden on the island of Grenada a few years ago. It was designed by



Lawrence who was in the hospitality trade in Canada and when he returned to his native Grenada started his botanical garden without any prior knowledge of horticulture. He told us that when he found a new plant, he would put into Google a rough description 'large fan-like leaves 2' tall' and up would come a name. His two-acre garden now contains over 300 plant species, and includes 40 varieties of palm, arthuriums, bromeliads and orchids. I don't think I have seen such a well-labelled display of plants.



There are many Apps one can get nowadays to identify plants but few of us have made such a brilliant garden starting with so little knowledge.

## **BARKS, TRUNKS AND TREES**

*Except during the nine months before he draws his first breath, no man manages his affairs as well as a tree does.*  
*George Bernard Shaw*

Winter is a good time to admire tree trunks. Without their leaves, trees can be appreciated for their barks. As well as many colourful tree trunks, such as the chalky white of silver birch, there are those trees whose bark peels away to reveal a different colour underneath and shrubs with brilliantly coloured stems like the dogwoods.



*Silver Birches at Anglesey Abbey*



*The coloured branches of Dogwood*



*Paper Bark Maple(Acer griseum at Kew*

### **ARTISTIC USE OF BARK**



*A knitted installation from Pallant House Gallery*



*Artificial tree from West Dean*



*Use of concrete tree trunks in French architecture*

### **THE BEAUTY OF OLD TRUNKS ..... BARK TO BARK**



*The beauty of bark*



*Mulberry tree in Oxford Botanical gardens  
planted in 1800*



*Olive tree over 800 years old in Puglia*



*A camouflage tree from WW1  
used to hide a sniper*

## **BARK PUT TO USE**

Bark has been used to make cloth, canoes and ropes and also as a surface for paintings and map making. A number of plants are also grown for their attractive or interesting bark colorations and surface textures or their bark is used as landscape mulch.

## **LOOKING BARK .....TO THE NEED FOR QUININE**

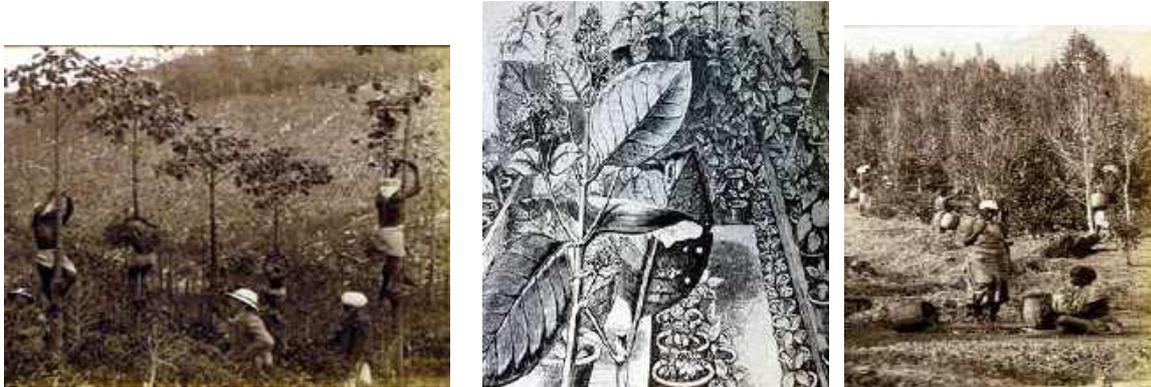


*Bark from a cinchona tree*

It has been said that the three technological inventions of quinine, guns and steamboats were the key tools in European imperial ideas. Although malaria is commonly considered a disease of tropical lands, in the C17 malaria affected vast parts of Europe. Then there was only one cure available, bleeding. In the 1630s a positive treatment was found in the forests of the Andean mountains. A monk wrote about “a tree they call the ‘fever tree’ whose bark of the colour of cinnamon made into powder amounting to the weight of two small silver coins and given as a beverage cures the fevers and tertiana.” He was describing the cinchona tree the bark of which contains the alkaloids effective against malaria. The name ‘cinchona’ is said to have come from the name of the Countess of Chinch who had her febrile condition treated with the bark in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. Linne named the tree cinchona in 1742. Without a steady supply of quinine, British imperialism in India might have failed, as without this anti-malaria drug, vast numbers of British administrators might have been killed by the disease. It is recorded that the average life span for a Briton in India in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was 31 for a man and 28 for a woman. Quinine obtained from cinchona trees was the answer and eventually these trees were successfully transplanted to India and by 1867 there were 1,200 acres of cinchona plantations in India, mostly in the Darjeeling and Nilgiri areas.

Cinchona bark was the only source of quinine until a formal chemical synthesis was accomplished in 1944 by American chemists.

The popularity of a *burra peg* of gin with tonic at the Club in India started because of its medicinal properties. Cheers!



*Stripping the bark from cinchona trees in the Nilgiri Hills*

## LOOKING BACK..... TO LANDSCAPE PAINTING



A Claude Glass - essentially a small, treated mirror contained in a box - is a portable drawing and painting aid that was widely used in the later 18th century by amateur artists on sketching tours. The reflections in it of surrounding scenery were supposed to resemble some of the characteristics of Italian landscapes by the famous 17th-century painter and sketcher Claude Lorrain, hence the name. The 'glass' consists of a slightly convex blackened mirror, which was carried in the hand and held up to the eye. The image thus seen was the scenery **behind**, looking back over their shoulder- rather than in front of - the user. The mirror's convexity reduced extensive views to the dimensions of a small drawing. The use of a blackened rather than an ordinary silvered mirror resulted in a somewhat weakened reflection, which stressed the prominent features in the landscape at the expense of detail. It also lowered the colour key. A larger version of this device is said on occasion to have been fixed to the windows of horse-drawn carriages in order to reflect the passing scenery.



Thomas Gainsborough - *Man with Claude glass*



Claude Lorrain - *Pastoral Landscape*

### **The answers to the Christmas reading Quiz**

Pat the White Rabbit's gardener in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Mr McGregor – *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*

Boothby Groundskeeper of Starfleet Academy in *Star Trek*

Samwise Gamgee in *Lord of the Rings*

Goods *The Good Life*

Pomona Sprout Herbology teacher in *Harry Potter*

Chance the Gardener in film *Being There*.

### **LOOKING BACK 100 years to 1921**

**Firstly, the appearance of a detective who in retirement started to grow marrows....**

“I saw the chance to escape into the garden. I am rather fond of gardening. I was busily exterminating dandelion roots when a shout of warning sounded from close by and a heavy body whizzed by my ears and fell at my feet with a repellent squelch. It was a vegetable marrow! I looked up angrily. Over the wall, to my left, there appeared a face. An egg-shaped head, partially covered with suspiciously black hair, two immense moustaches, and a pair of watchful eyes. It was our mysterious neighbour, Mr Poirot. He broke at once into fluent apologies. ‘I demand of you a thousand pardons, monsieur. I am without defence. For some months now I cultivate the marrows. This morning suddenly I enrage myself with these marrows. I send them to promenade themselves – alas! not only mentally but physically. I seize the biggest. I hurl him over the wall. Monsieur, I am ashamed. I prostrate myself.’



*The Mysterious Affair at Styles* was published in the UK in 1921 and Hercules Poirot and his little grey cells were here to stay. But perhaps Poirot didn't realise that marrows can contain toxins called cucurbitacins and in August 2015, a 79-year-old German man and his wife ate a marrow grown by a neighbour. The couple were taken ill and the man died, analysis of the meal confirmed the presence of cucurbitacin. This was a sad accident but his gardening prowess might have provided Poirot with the ability to solve what might have otherwise proved to be a perfect murder should marrows have been involved.

The record weight of a giant marrow is **93.7 kg**.

### **LOOKING BACK 50 YEARS.....**

In 1971 - DDT was banned in USA; Hillier's Manual of trees and shrubs was published for the first time; and Roy Lancaster spent three months on an expedition in Nepal studying Himalayan plants.

Many changes occurred that year at Kew Gardens. With decimalisation the entrance fee rose from 3d (the old thruppenny bit) to 1p. John Heslop- Harrison became the new Director of Kew.

### **ENOUGH FACTS FOR YOU TO BECOME A MASTERMIND WITH KEW GARDENS AS YOUR SPECIALIST SUBJECT.....**



- During the Second World War, the Great Pagoda became the perfect place to test the aerodynamics of bombs in secret
- Brought back in 1775 by Frances Masson from South Africa, the cyad – *Encephalartos altensteinii* which is kept in the Palm House, is the world's oldest pot plant.



- Kew Gardens includes more than 50,000 different plants in its living collection, and over 7 million preserved specimens.



- Over 750,000 volumes and illustrations are contained in its library.
- No food, no smoking, decent attire, no prams, no playing and no refreshments! These were some of the strict entrance rules for visitors to the Gardens during the 19th century.
- From 1792, exotic animals were kept in the paddock next to Queen Charlotte's Cottage.

- The menagerie comprised colourful Tartarian pheasants and the first kangaroos to arrive in Britain.



- The iron work of the Palm House was originally painted green and the glass panels were green tinted as this was thought to help plants grow. They were proved wrong.
- There are still the remains under the Palm House of the railway tunnels which were used to bring coke for heating the glasshouse, these long tunnels were also used to carry smoke away from the boilers, and rather than ruin the beauty of the Palm House with a chimney, a smokestack connected to the tunnels was disguised as an Italianate bell tower



## LOOKING BACK..... The wisdom of gardeners in the past



*Some persons may think that Flowers are of no use, that they are nonsensical things....I hesitate not a moment to prefer the plant of a fine carnation to a gold watch set with diamonds.* William Cobbett 1763 –1835

### The Language of Flowers

The Floral Code is thought to have begun in the Ottoman Empire. In a culture where the sexes could not speak freely it was left to flowers to do the talking. So, it came to be that an iris meant NO and a grape hyacinth meant YES. In 1718, Lady Mary Wortley Montague wrote from Constantinople to a friend in England with the details of this Floral Code and over the years this concept caught the imagination of a limited circle. In 1820, *The Language of Flowers* was published and this established The Floral Code in Europe. In Victorian times young ladies were delighted to have another accomplishment to add to their skills and took up the challenge of learning the code and recognising the plants involved. The code worked by the giving or receiving of a posy or a single flower. The recipient could then answer yes by touching the flower with her lips and no by pulling off a petal. A double rose symbolised love, a white lily – purity, sweet violets represented modesty. The language of flowers became more and more complex with the use of rarer and rarer specimens, such as the Nutmeg Geranium, and it lasted until after WW1 when the freedom of the 20s meant such a language was not necessary. Despite what I said about Googling earlier, if you wish to know more details – do consult the internet!

## KEEPING WARM IN THE GARDEN

Isolation and then the ability to entertain one or two people in your garden has brought about a surge in the sales of fire pits. Visitors to The Newt in Somerset were greeted in the autumn by a splendid fire in the courtyard, but what wood should one burn?



*Applewood will scent your room,  
with an incense-like perfume.*

*Beechwood fires are bright and clear,  
if logs are kept for a year.*

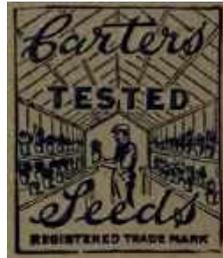
*Birch and fir logs burn too fast,  
blaze up bright and do not last.*

*But ash logs, all smooth and grey,  
burn them green or old.*

*Buy up all that come your way.*

*They're worth their weight in gold.*

**There are two seasonal diversions that can ease the bite of any winter. One is the January thaw. The other is the seed catalogues. - Hal Borland**



**LOOKING FORWARD TO BROWSING THE SEED CATALOGUES AND A LOOK BACK ON SEED SALES IN THE PAST.....**



*A display cabinet (about 1900) from the Garden History Museum.*

This is one of the surviving display cabinets supplied to ironmongers and department stores by the seed company Yates. It was made at a time when seeds were sold over the shop counter and it would have been put on the counter itself. The seed packets were kept in drawers at the back of the cabinet. Yates Seeds was founded in Manchester by George Yates in about 1800. In the 1880s, two of his grandsons opened further branches in New Zealand and Australia, and the brand is still well known there. It no longer exists in Britain.

### **FOLLOW THAT STAR!**



Epiphany is on January 6<sup>th</sup> and commemorates the biblical story of the Three Wise Men who followed the star to Bethlehem. But many believe, including the Vatican, that this star was in fact two planets, Jupiter and Saturn, which when they appear together in the night sky are known as the 'Great Conjunction'. Last year (2020) when these planets came together on December 21<sup>st</sup> they were visible in the SW night sky, and they appeared closer to each other on that date than they had for nearly 400 years and it was around 800 years since they were so visible, I present, with a little foreboding, the floral **Star of Bethlehem** *Ornithogalum umbellatum*



It is a widespread species of bulb native throughout much of Europe, as well as north-west Africa and south-west Asia. and flowers in April and May. When growing in favourable conditions, it forms carpets of low-growing foliage, topped with numerous white, starry flowers. It looks great grown in large drifts on a sunny bank of soil, or used as underplanting for deciduous trees and shrubs. Although the flowers attract bees and other insects, the plants are highly toxic so beware! There are, as you can see, so many other star shaped flowers. However, Star of Bethlehem facts conclude that it is safest to grow this plant in containers or areas where it may be kept confined. Many agree that it is best not to plant it at all. Some say Star of Bethlehem flowers are good companion plants for early blooming

hellebores and dianthus. Others remain steadfast in the notion that the plant is a noxious weed and should never be planted as an ornamental.



## LOOKING FORWARD TO A QUIZ - An A B C of garden terms:

**What do these gardening terms mean?**

**Abreuvoir** 1. A drinking place for animals sometimes treated as a garden ornament  
2. A method of raising water to supply fountains and other water features

3. A clearing at the end of an allée used to direct the eye to borrowed landscape.

**Adonis Garden** 1. A garden or garden room containing plants brought back to UK by A. C. Adonis.  
2. Small gardens in terracotta pots placed outside Adonis temples during festivals  
3. An area in a garden containing only statues, often with a central pond

**Armillary sphere** 1. a type of spherical sundial  
2. Name in topiary given to sphere-shaped box bushes  
3. 3D carpet bedding – usually in geometrical shapes

**Belt** 1. A strip of trees  
2. An acronym for the British and European Library of Trees kept at Kew- B.E.L.T.  
3. Term used when plants such as lettuce have started to set seed.

**Berceau** 1. The equivalent of a gardeners' bothy found in French gardens  
2. A vaulted trellis used to grow climbing plants  
3. Payment to Head Gardeners in 19<sup>th</sup> century

**Bostan** 1. A wooden fence  
2. A Persian word for orchard  
3. A tool for edging lawns

**Casino** 1. A small house or garden building  
2. An Italian musical fountain  
3. A grape variety

**Coronary garden** 1. A Jubilee Garden to celebrate a monarch's coronation.

