

GARDENING NEWBIES

WENDY WEBB



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Wendy Webb

HOBBY FOR BEGINNERS

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Dear Reader

We are all learners where the garden is concerned. This book is written to inspire you, to make you laugh and so that you take nothing for granted.

So many people garden – it has provided nourishment and refreshment for many who need to get away from it all. Moments in the garden inspire the rest of each day. Choose the garden that suits you – for now. Whatever you learn is never wasted.

It's got you out of doors (even that windowbox, or tiny area where sunshine never stretches). There are plants for every type of gardening; disasters to laugh over, new colours or styles to try.

Never say never, but beware: once you dabble in gardening, you could become hooked. One season or four. Fairweather or foul. Whether it's to see the sky, or wildlife, to sit outside for a cuppa and let the day's troubles drain away, there's something for everyone.

No-one's an expert – except on their own plot – and then there are those disastrous years of strange weather… a gardener never stops learning.

You may even turn it into other hobbies and crafts. Where will the garden path lead you?

WHERE DO I BEGIN?!?

If you want a hobby that you can put down and forget about, not miss like a dear friend, something that is not addictive and will not cause you travel sickness when away, then don't read on!

Once a gardener, always a gardener. No matter the size of your house, bungalow, flat, caravan or room-share, once you have the bug for gardening then you will always find a way. Whatever body part gives out, you will beg for alternative methods of gardening. If you once had a Victorian house with a veg plot at the bottom of the garden, one day you may have a patio the size of a postage stamp/or a window ledge, and you will find a way.

My window ledge was in Central London, the year of the big STORM. I brought my babies indoors and went back to sleep – woken in the early hours to ask if I had survived!

Rich or poor, disabled or able-bodied, working all-hours or home-alone too often – you will find a way. Just watch a smattering of TV gardeners and see. Or Radio, or Magazines.

ANNUALS & PERENNIALS

Begin where you are. Now. With whatever you've got! But there are a few tips that are worth learning, soon as!

You may happen to pick up a few jolly plants on your way into the supermarket; or head for the DIY and mystified what to do with a tray of plugs… I mean, plants.

It's a good idea to water them – first! Just make sure you aren't indoors on a favourite carpet at the time… then plant them – oh, where? Anywhere, preferably with soil around them. Also, the bigger the pot, the easier to water them; regularly. More plants, less pain!

You probably picked up Annuals; then wonder why they don't come back next year… Or it was a delicate specimen from the tropics and wilts at the first frost/or wind. Some are a little shady, in the sunshine they die.

First lesson well-learned – by you, not the plant. Don't give up, in the advanced class you may have happened on some Perennials – chances are, if they like you, they will be back next year (same time, same place).

Let's ignore big words (like Biennials or Ericaceous soil).

If you have been reading up first, you may have dug over your bed (not the feathered sort, just a bit of soil): not too thin, not too spread out or trodden on by the Postie along the path. A nice rectangle; or circle; or wavy snake. You have chosen somewhere that won't burn dry in a heatwave; nor flooding beside an overflow pipe; it maybe overlooked (by trees/shrubs/or neighbours).

You may also have added fertilizer/plant food. When you slide in your baby plants, they will stretch out their little roots and go Whoopie! Don't squash them too tight. You will remember to water them and when Autumn strikes you will be sad to see them die-back and look miserable or dead.

If you are a very lucky beginner, someone will have suggested Evergreens, something that can survive our winters (depending where you live). Something to cheer you that all is not lost.

TOOLS FOR THE JOB

You probably have some already, in the shed at the bottom of the garden. They maybe rusty, or need oiling. You might be sensible and buy a little set from the DIY store. Nothing fancy, just a:

Trowel
Secateurs
Spade
Rake
Shears

Remember, you get what you pay for; but why spend the earth when you don't know what works best? They won't make you a better gardener, just reduce the curses.

Whatever else you do, don't forget – they're sharp! They can do terrible things… hopefully, to plants. Hopefully, when you lop off a limb, it was intentional. Follow the rules – read carefully. You may already have the lawnmower (or left it for the wildlife…, wildflowers and grasses, I mean). You may need eye protection. You certainly need to avoid garden jobs when you're not 100% (just sit and read and listen to the birdsong – you did include a bird feeder, didn't you?).

ANY OLD HERB!

I'm not talking about Herbaceous Perennials – what? Nor even the delightful poppy. Nor anything requiring a greenhouse, hothouse, extra power supply nor water butts.

But herbs can be grown on the kitchen windowsill. Pull off leaves as needed – or dry and shred them, save on buying supermarket pots. Ignore the gardener that suggests Basil (it's temperamental!).

Just try Rosemary and Thyme, and Sage, and Mint. Actually, Mint will get everywhere (so restrict it in a pot, it spreads like weeds!). Then you can browse along the aisles and experiment with Curry Plant, or Chocoate Mint. It's a quick-fix feel-good once you are eating what you've grown. They also look good in winter, so what's not to like?

Then it's time to buy Sprouts and and other green leaves, fresh from your windowsill. There's plenty of Magazines promoting them; or they may appear on the Garden shelf of your supermarket. If you look at seeds in a Garden Centre, the choice may give you a headache…

FOOD AND DRINK

Not for the Gardener! Plants need little to survive: food, drink, and sunshine. The trick is to know which plants are greedy and which are delicate little flowers ready to throw a tantrum. There's a clue: if the plant label says 'Hardy', you stand a good chance of not killing it. It may survive most things the English weather system may throw at it; however, beware, too many seasons too close may act like the year of the great Storm!

Read the label, plant, pat the soil in place around it (get its tootsies dirty), water and feed, then sit back and watch it grow. Watering regularly (weekly? Not daily…). Plants are different, read the label.

Food for plants: firstly, sunshine (as much or little as each plant likes); then plant food (can be droppered or measured out into your watering can). Even lawns benefit from an Autumn and Spring feed, with the right nutrients. If you want wildflowers; they often hate overeating! Try the Supermarket, DIY or Garden Centre (each has its own mix of entertainment for adults: food, drink, treats, books, footwear…).

WATCHING YOUR GARDEN GROW…

One TV Gardener suggested the first job of a new gardener was: sit in the deckchair and watch your garden! He may have dozed off… the point is, no-one knows their own garden like the owner. Every season is different, each plant has its own time to shine.

It probably takes years to learn what month, which colour, and what height and spread, will appear onstage with your other little stars… and for how long. To balance this 4-D painting from all angles, all-seasons, including winter, well, that's why you visit other people's gardens. To see what's meant to happen!

Otherwise, spend at least ten years getting to know your garden intimately, working out its little foibles. Talking to any serious gardener willing to share a few tips. Oh, and watch those TV Gardening programmes – they're all different. Bear in mind, some of them have a massive budget; while others are just playing with their viewers. You don't need to follow every trend. Just get a monthly Gardening Magazine, one that's easy to pick up and put down, one that explains step by step. Preferably while downing a cuppa tea in the potting shed.

DISASTERS, CURSES & CURES

Guaranteed, once you nurture your little plot/or bed, all the wildlife in the neighbourhood will descend on you. Try to keep it moving on (or staying). There are plenty of books on Pests and Diseases. Basically: it could be fungal, doing nasty things to your leaves; or it could be creeping around or flying in and dumping lots of babies (eggs, caterpillars, creepy-crawlies) among your most delicate petals.

You can spray some to death, but the spray isn't too fussy. Don't do nasties to bees (any bees), nor butterflies (some make an exception for the cabbage whites), and you really don't want to be responsible for neighbouring cats who may eat…

So read the instructions carefully; especially if children or animals share the garden. There are organic alternatives for many things – but they may be expensive; or not work so well. Learn for yourself.

There are many ways to deal with slugs and snails (pet hate) – some more humane than others. Remember, ladybirds and many colourful beasts may lurk happily in your garden – they may even be harmless (even if you keep your distance!).

HIS, HERS, THEM & THEIRS…

As with all things, variety is the spice of life! There's an incredible bounty of colours and flamboyance in plants; some even make your life easier by being disease-resistant; or have won a RHS Award. Gives you a better chance of getting things right, first time with a new plant introduced to your own garden.

Every garden is unique; some gardeners will only grow veg; others flowers. Some want a Mediterranean or Desert plain, or Beach garden (plants that can manage lots of salt and wind), others are Tropical forests and unbelievably survive our winters (but only if you have the experience and live in the right parts of the country). Know your conditions, so more of your delicate plants will survive: in sun/or shade, in moist/or dry, ericaceous soil for Rhododendrons, for example). Some gardeners will even bring their plants indoors for the winter; or provide heating inside the greenhouse.

Live and let live! The plants; and their gardeners too! You may even fancy a change; and can relandscape and reuse some plants and pavings.

DRESSING THE GARDEN!

As for the gardener, wear what you like (within reason); if it's not reasonable, then please ensure you have a very secluded garden, because you don't want to upset the neighbours.

Bear in mind, some plants from a tiny pot can grow into a massive tree; please don't plant on a boundary; they won't understand to drop branches/acorns/leaves/or block neighbouring light/or create hazards to public services.

Your garden may lift the spirits of those walking past; please try not to raise blood pressure of sensitive passers-by. Include focal points and vistas that lead you in to your little Eden; borrow the landscape beyond your boundaries as good gardeners have done for centuries.

Everything has a price and everyone a budget. There are other things in life beside the garden; especially those who share a home with. Sometimes, the garden needs to allow for the practical (visitors, washing lines, easy to mow shaped lawn).

PUTTING IT ALL TO BED

No matter how glorious your garden has become (generally around late June-early July), nor how well you have remembered to plant for a long season, the day it's threatened will be noticeable. Experienced gardeners can scent the change of season, the very day the sap has stopped rising.

For the rest of us, we plan that time when sensitive plants die-back for winter. Some plants return indoors, or they're protected from harsher winter. Keeping the garden simple (no fussy plants that need lots of work), we know Perennials will be back same time next year. We take seeds of some; or cuttings to grow on indoors. We keep things looking tidy and thank TV Gardening programmes for encouraging us to choose hard landscaping (something worth looking at, minus plants).

There maybe ornaments or wind chimes, furniture that needs treating or putting away. Some things remain. Also, some gardeners… their gardens are a delight all year: because they have Evergreens, and statuesque shrubs that delight by their colour or shape. Autumn is a good time to plant and fill in gaps. Hopefully, there are plenty of Spring bulbs ready to spark off your season next year?

VITAL NUTRIENTS FOR THE GARDENER

Ah, yes, all summer you have delighted in BBQs (not causing fires), food, drink, wine and beer, cool boxes, and mugs of tea (chilly, gardening all year).

Debris has been cleared away (depending on the plant), mulches added (to keep in moisture), compost bins for nutrients next year, new water butts to save on mains water. Paths swept, tools tidied and put away, minor fence repairs, treating benches. You may proudly watch a large tub or two, in pride of place, gleaming with colour to last until Spring.

You have carefully pruned your shrubs and trees, to remove dead or diseased or overhanging branches; or to deal with climbers (following different rules for each type). Now is the time to hunker down, to read and plan for next year, to view TV Gardening programmes or take out a new Magazine subscription.

You may also join gardening communities online, or drool over plants on the RHS website. Your choice – but you're allowed to take breaks from gardening; or go on holiday; choose another hobby that helps the gardener (DIY? Growning your own food?).

A CHANGE IS AS GOOD…

For the serious gardener, they may plan to allow holidays away from their beloved plants. To redesign a garden feature or revamp a tired area. They may have to start from scratch, with an unforgiving new plot. Planning for less watering, lower maintenance, climate changes, our own mobility and whether any other gardener can step in when you put away those gardening gloves.

So take up the camera, photograph your little Eden – all ages and stages and seasons. Create your own picture books as seasonal gifts. Or perhaps you are organized and have spent weeks dealing with a bumper crop of fruit; turning it into jam; or wine?

Gardening is not one, but many, hobbies. Write about it! There must be other gardeners out there, who could add to this little library of helpful books?

Tie-dyeing from colours you have grown? Drying your own herbs, then looking for recipes? Above all, remember, Gardening – a hobby – is a way of life; wonderful for Wellbeing, for sharing (produce/tips); and for admiring while reading a good book (with a glass in your hand). Cheers!

UNTIL THE SNOWDROPS APPEAR

The leaves of Autumn flame and burn,
regress to dying season's turn;
drift crumpled falls pile without sound,
mute cracklings lost upon dull ground.
Trees raise stark limbs to sky's harsh 'Now',
bewildered gales wail-stress each 'How…'.
Weak sun glints wanly, cold and bare,
migrating birds flit through sheet air.
Stars' thousand eyes gleam through dark night,
till drifting snow makes all things bright;
then as new mornings creep in time,
shy Drops of Snow peep through slush grime.
Harsh bitter freeze begins to thaw,
until dawn's Spring arrives once more.

EMERGING FROM A BOG

Dark, ancient woodland gleams where water leads,
beside a river's bog and hollowed tree;
a wreck of twigs stirs chirrups, brightly free
and sunshine graces light on dreary reeds.
I'm slowing down, although my youth fast-feeds
on snowdrops gleaned from dappled morning's sea;
I sense a robin, scene it wild like me…
whose smarting cheeks smear chills of buried seeds.
Dense shadows shorten and bright ducks float by,
to breezes' unfamiliar contoured trace.
The sun's upon my back and birds warn, clear,
as tadpoles hide in shade, to bridge a sigh:
fine sun is beaming warmth upon my face
and I unearth green shoots of heaven's cheer.

A QUESTION FOR THE BEES

To bees or not to bees?
They show sage gardeners when to ‘busy be’
and as the Glasshouse Effect confuses flowers
and birds sing to the Eye of the Gale,
the Green Man rubs and oils his tools.
With earthen hands he’s pricking out,
then makes a cuppa in the potting shed.

Snow storms erase his path through nature’s buds
and bees buzz off until another day
(of crocuses wide open to the sun,
of honeysuckle a winter’s white);
while whistling bards dream of picking daffodils.

ECHOTAIN

Sun rises
after days of February cold
and cold blooms open,
wide open in dancing smiles.
Blooms raise their faces
like the sun on a bright March morning
and shivers vanish
and no cold seeps through gloved hands
and jackets are discarded, dripping,
as gardeners rake and dig the ground for life.

Shoots rise, bright as spring,
and there's a spring in the step as doors slam,
or – winter's shock – are left wide,
wide open to lunch. Ajar
to raucous crows and gentle doves
and tradition dictates:

'March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb'
but there are no lions in the garden this year,
only the hope of wild sunflower manes rising,
no bleating lambs, just cooing doves
and gentle, gentle flowers.

Spring's cold no longer tremors bones,
just blushing green and red
and white and yellow
and yellow faces warm beneath the sun
and open, all like purses full of change
and human life is golden for a time
and livered skin, no longer pursed,
shines like the morning sun
at spring's first smile.

PEACE OF THE ENGLISH GARDEN

Daffodils shine rigid bright attention
displaying medals every shade of gold.
Summer's breath, bewildered, bakes crisp springtime.
Hellebores slump earthward-rolling snowdrifts.

Hyacinths, yet blushing, bow out slowly
as Spanish bluebells twinkle in dull earth.
Too green for envy's night, a carpet lawn,
anemones' messed leaves unfurl elf shades.

Dark Pieris flowers, winding long white sheets,
Red Robin thrusts growth, glossy in fired air.
For ever blooms of pristine primroses
And, always, trails of cloud witness blue sky.

Forsythia, no coward, storms like sand
and roses bud their scarlet, vow to flower.
Dwarf tulips dance in carnival too soon,
sun sets in hawthorn's trooping emerald leaves.

A blackbird calls, as blackbirds always will,
flush collared doves descend and croon of love.
Wood pigeons crash through branches, stealing nuts,
and feeders swing with finches in the breeze.

From dawn to setting sun I hear the cries,
a riot of dull sense my waking hours.
For life is LIVE as cameras still roll
and peace is months or worlds away from here.

COME INTO THE GARDEN, VIRGINIA

Her garden seasons life in sunrise red,
she digs and plants and prunes around youth green.
Trumpeting a maze of shoots, bud yellow,
as hyacinths, brash church bells, peel bright pink
and snowdrops quake, all weathers, ancient white;
waiting muscari's trace, nerve-jangling blue.

Late winter, yet a time for feeling blue
and wind gusts into gales an angry red
and pallid earth, such recent virgin white,
her heart buds envy, greedy for spring's green.
Viburnum, blooming late, now dawns sky-pink:
crocus gold binds aconite's brash yellow.

Structure shapes the garden goldcrest yellow
and ceonothus promises deep blue
and cistus' bushy form will tissue pink,
photinia shoots first in robin red.
Leylandii, laurels, bays, all shades of green
and many budding flowers' bridal white.

Eyes teased by focal points seek views, dove-white,
winding routes raise scenes of duck's bill yellow;
disguised temptation in shrub's hooded green
and plays on water features, iris blue.
Soon pieris shoots will carnival bright red
and standard rose bathe bare in cherub pink.

Perspective's not for those whose journey's pink,
nor old man's beard, nor rose a Christmas white.
Virginia creeps up when autumn's red,
paints nails nerine, hair tied primrose yellow.
Crocosmia her dress, shoes tramelled blue,
her salad days all picked for heaven's green.

WINTER GARDEN

Winter's bare bones:
structure of fences
trees' spines undressed

grasses shimmering dampness
robust, shapely evergreens
seedheads beguiling death

mahonia's brash sunbeams
viburnum's blush dawn
bewitching red Diane

‘COME INTO THE GARDEN MAUD’

I could go Japanese,
but my life is far from simple
and time must fly before I meditate.

I could turn vibrant Indian,
with the scorch of earth and drapes,
but howling winds would shred them bare.

I could dare a Mediterranean calm:
my sea so blue and fruiting trees
and tasting olives, wine glass full.
But formal lines might bring firm order now
and I could dream of English homes,
Elizabethan dress and tennis games.

I could go minimalist,
rusting iron, recycled tyres
or stainless steel chic.

I could bring a little heaven to my earth
and bloom my soul with fantasies
of champagne features sparkling dawn,

or I could simply be within my verdant plot
and watch the seasons as they pass –
engaging in no artistry but sky.

SKELETON KEY TO LIFE

The leaf's a very complex engine, fuelled
by solar power, roots and by thin air.
A skeleton so perfectly designed
with petiole to stretch from leaf blade's tip
to swollen end, absission's planned weak point,
so leaves will fall in gales and save the stem.

The leaf withdraws, in autumn, its moisture
and falls to fuel organic growth from mould.

The leaf turns surface area to the sun
and bounces, shock-absorbing wind and rain.
With fine veins, stretched from midrib to the edge
of thickened cellulose supplying cells.

This Transport Café channels all supplies,
the epidermis tops and binds each leaf,
with varnish gloss or hair, retaining damp.
Light penetrates through clear translucent cells
to mesophyll, the middle of the leaf.
This is the engine plant to feed green plants.

Leaf words are Greek to meet consuming mouth:
stomata on the undersides eat breath
in carbon dioxide, helping process fuel
for photosynthesis, with water, sun;
chlorophyll turns light to sun-sweet sugar
and all we see is that the leaf is green.

What autumn colours sweeten as they die
and what a joy when leaves sprout new each spring.

AND SOON, SUMMER

There is nothing blue about winter:
though newness dates every thought and hour
Christmas has sufficient Blues for all.
Let me tell you about those cold months,
when each new dawning roots promised spring.
Buds and shoots appear, as if by chance,
in mute certainty of what follows,
step-by-step to astute eyes, waiting
to breed, to seed, to feed… and to weed.
Soon – too soon – munching.

What early dance for January Gold,
Snowdrops enhancing each fall of snow,
enchanting Crocus: purple, gold, white.
Intense Iris Reticulata;
grandma's heady fragrant Hyacinth.
Muscari grapes cinching floating seas,
with Minnow, Jetfire and Tête à Tête.
Fur Elise, like ice cream cones that drool
blooming's pleasure, though it's barely March.
Soon – too soon – munching.

With the vengeance of procreation,
vengeful, flaccid slugs, bugs, aphids breed:
protected, milked by storms of armed ants,
as pristine forms of tulips open:
Apeldoorn, Peach Blossom, Queen of Night.
De Caen Anemones beam for weeks,
Georgette Tulips open many heads;
until Alliums' turgid stiff stalks
crowning snowflakes, purple robes, June pinks.
Soon – too soon – munching…

SOFTEN RED SKY TO NIGHT

You're gone and now your body's not the same.
So dull and lifeless, you're not there. It's plain
that you have flown away beyond this realm
and earth has lost a gem, a glowing stone
that sets in ruby night, now you've gone home.
Coal spots, as eyes, you grey my mood to rain.
Buried gently, but infinitely near:
your rest is as an earth-bound, not a dove.
Surrounded by those flowers loved so dear
you are, to me, a garden I can't leave.
To compost you'll return your verve, since here
your heart remains in every bloom and leaf.
Your words are worth a child's delight and joy,
so fly, bright ladybird, my paduasoy.

ENCOUNTER BRIEF AS LIFE

Red Admirals mate for life:
a brief encounter flitting above the buddleja,
shadows pairing against clear skies –
formations of Red Arrows,
displaying art like summer's day,
before they plummet, Red Devils with their seed,
to nettle gardeners for their crops –
and mate for life next year.

FELINE CARELESSNESS

Newly raked earth is irresistible.
You saunter across, lazy in the sun,
a sheltered closet shades your bush toilette.
Sabotaged next day, you sniff the damp air,
stepping four neat feet in a flower pot,
skimming round the rim in a token scratch.
Slinking beneath the car's cooler shadow,
you desert the futile digs - deposit
your sole declaration of all-out-war.
A frog croaks loudly its neighbourhood watch,
bellowing a waspish wind's submission
as it gusts and prowls a false dementia.
Unperturbed, you swish the woodchip litter
and fertilise the roses with your claws.
Peppered to extinction, you sniff the air;
leave your calling card on a greener lawn.

BEATRIX POTTER'S POCKET HANDKERCHIEFS

I saw Mrs Tiggywinkle today
and she was in a sorry state: her dress
and pinny were no more and on the floor
her body lay so still but not quite dead.
Each buzzing fly had marked her out as prey,
they did not leave her gently heaving chest.
No fear remained as I leant close to see
that sun had raised its ugly golden head
to beat the traces of her muzzle dry
and settle air before rain's cooling fall -
too late for her to launder tales so sweet
that children keep their pocket handkerchiefs
lest Mrs Tiggywinkle pass their way.
I could not let such childish fancies fade.

I took a dropper, fat with crystal cure
and watched pure moisture drip on slender nose
until she rose from her dull slouch and sniffed
and dared to move an inch to gentler shade
and made no protest as I built her hide,
providing her a place to cool and rest.
I could not feed, would she regain her strength?
My neighbour's cat food might have cheered her but
I rang in vain – and then I saw a way
that she could stay and fatten for her task
to launder dreams and peg them to the sky,
so children's eyes are dry in tales so wild.
Then Mrs Tiggy fed with rampant greed –
the feed: a snail winkled from its shell.

IT'S JULY

It's July and roses, bloated from endless blooming,
droop messy petals in pretty glow,
as lilies, brash, stand sentinel and gleam
pillar-box red or tropical orange.
Hypericum, as sunbeams, dance on shrubs
and mallow lavatera blushes along each stem,
an early showgirl, while hollyhocks still rise.

Blue lace catananche follows nigella
(Love lost in green mist)
more delicate than columbine's fat seedheads.
Spiraea seas' froth pink
as honesty whitens - a full moon.

Burst Johnson blue or Wargrave pink,
geraniums gloriflorious in bloom.
Hibiscus, fat-leaved, buds with late sun's hope,
as mahonia's soft holly fronds rise sharp.
Begonia, a beast, to budding beauty;
while fuschia candy droops and dangles late.
Pussy willow's leaves are dense and hide;
sun rises, tissue-fine, rose cistus blooms;
star's purple nostrils – five - with yellow eye.

Green apples fatten garden's ripe new hope;
lobelia tumbles over tubs, at sea in Cambridge blue,
while fatsia, all fingers, gleams with pride.
Cordyline stands statuesque, slim whips,
and euonymus tones everything to green.
Madonnas rise, pure, facing slug assault,
or lily beetles, berry-bright on green.
Honeysuckle's exuberant;
clematis blushes deepest shades of rose,
while buddleja, the bully, visits late.

Slate cools the fairies' tree to light and dark,
while fresh new arbour calms, a shade of sky.
Bare winter bones shield hebe's gentler fronds;
July has burst, full crowded, almost spent.

IN DEFENCE OF THE SLUG

The slugs are wobbly short fat worms
and humans hate the way they squirm.
They are, resourceful worms, so firm
they chew through plant life's epiderm.
They're fat enough to pop their clogs
inside a beak or where hedgehogs
munch all night long on snails and slugs,
until they hide in pots and tugs
where gardeners, so mean all day,
provide night safety for their play.
But then, next morning, bringing salt,
slug trails evaporate and halt.
Poor slugs secure the greatest prize,
food in a garden for wildlife.

IT'S SEPTEMBER

It's September and borders are fat with dahlias;
geranium florets stand pert and polished;
leaves tinge to first hints of autumn days
and colder nights.
Light disappears fast as evening approaches
plump with clouds lately pregnant for a final fling.

The sun has lost its August edge
and hedges overcrowd in paved suburbia.
Sated nettles spread across the route
with brambles bursting ripened blackberries.

Children snake across the estate,
pristine and freshly unpacked,
until wrappings are dumped, with the school bell,
to screeches at beached dregs of summer's heat
and feet dip, squirming, late in paddling pool
before outdoors bores, Blue Peter beams,
recalling Proms and Tardis, Dr Who.

Roses raise a second flush,
petunias droop
and fuschias bud their socks off,
wriggle toes,
like beach days, or sidestepping crabs in rock pools
-waterfall blue -
light control;
until those bees are bedded for the night
and gentle snores buzz silence through the dark,
the slow – slow – quick – slow: autumn pace
when clocks return to winter cockleshells.

EACH TO ITS SEASON

I know it is autumn,
not because September falls tomorrow
or because of morning chills
or fattening gourds.

I know because the colchicum's in bloom,
a sunset strange to grace this stage at all
and burnish fiery shades upon the woodland floor.

For crocuses belong to trumpet spring
of purple, gold and white in pageant's state.

The Emperor has lost his clothes today
and confidently walks the city streets
to bugle players' lauding his great grace,
to shouts of Eden's vast benevolence,
to wear upon his personage – so bare –
the valour of an autumn garden, there
for everyone to see.

So I walk past autumn's crocus hoardes
and dare to raise my eyes to see such grace,
for nature seasons all beneficence,
displaying rarities so nude to dare
and wear each other's rude magnificence.

I know it is autumn upon the woodland floor –
in the morning chill I shiver
as I burnish bare as you.

IT'S NOVEMBER

As soon as the clocks were turned back,
a sad and tacky damp crawled in,
drifting skin-thin with wretched leaves
and heaps of worm-casts on the lawn,
now worn down dank as mud's rich slime.

Dark encroached its final traces;
afternoon's sad light shivering,
chill winter's clawing nails stretched out
too soon to say goodbye, to fall:
engorging embers, leaves to ash.

Yet summer reared its glorious fight
and kicked the air of freezing dawn,
to flush a lasting colour's mount
upon the winter's saddle, sound
the final hunts of redcoats, hounds.

White trousers muddied, beating rain
and flowers bushed while in full bloom.
Yet, beautiful with damp perfume,
the rose of England's halcyon days
all gone to monochrome winter.

IT'S DECEMBER

Late leaves are falling thick this year, like snow,
in floating light of winter's glowing gold.
Deep drifting earth of amber's cheering warmth
then sparks a blaze, too late for bonfire's flush.
Rage against the dying light.

Viburnum's floret blush bursts white to shine
in dull and darkened skies of grey and green,
while rhododendron's slowly fattened buds
soon promise summer's moist and turgid blooms.
Rage against dark's coming night.

Sharp frosts have shot begonias to death;
some, cradled in the hay, will bloom next year.
Pot mums have stained their pretty frocks to surf
their laundered tide marks, pegged to autumn's-course.
Rage a year once cradled, stiff.

It's cold and still and yet our songbirds bring
their ringing sundown of a year reborn.
Forlorn, no natal star, yet blackbirds tease
where robins, brash as berries, please the scene.
Rage for nature's stinging night.

All buds and bulbs mark winter's timely phase
and trace a fine maturing wine, to pour
rich heady scents, enriching longed-for spring.
Romance ferments, with birds, to fevered rage:
effervescent songs of light.

BERRY RIPE

In every moment's Autumn
Decay bleeds its golden hues
Our tissue-flimsy foibles
Seed our restless spirit's fuse.

Hours fall as Autumn leaves
Sheaf-folders clutter the desk
As seal-fresh crumbs decay untouched
Rust coffee delays our rest.

In the Autumn of our day
When the deadline is in sight
We prioritise our workload
Growing weary with each fight.

In each new season's Autumn
As we ripen to the next
We glimpse Spring shadows lengthening
And prepare our new life-text.

As Autumn pales to Winter
Birds shrill cold in weakened air
A ruddy fire-breast reminds us
Rich berries, bled, are jewel-rare.

TOPIARY

Clipping clipping
clip
shaping it like a ship
fitting in a fertile lawn
getting seasick and so green
clip

Chipping chipping
chip
insinuate a masculine form;
sinews rippling into flesh
life breathes not
nor dies
chip

Clipping clip
clip
cumulus of green,
  satisfying seen upon a lawn
so green and seasick, breathing life
clip
clip
clip clip.

PARCHED

The garden dry as beach days in my youth,
such lazy-hazy summer-endless days.
Dry shells as driftwood, crab-bloom pinching truth,
the garden dry as beach days in my youth.
Soft soothing rain descends as lasting proof
of grumble-greening sunshine words of praise.
The garden dry as beach days in my youth;
such lazy-hazy summer-endless days.

NEST DROP

Drop down the fragile egg shell from its nest,
in muted shades a naked carcass lies.
Obscene, the pavement bears no Bridge of Sighs,
or modest, in disguise, its autumn best.

Toss out a frail baby, when it's born,
grasp, cold, a shooting star before it flares.
Then catapult dull fancies into stares,
or stub, unknown, the spot its life was torn.

Dead-line, with press, youth headlines for a day,
daub, young, with garish browns the body, neat.
Decease, grown long, the wonder of small feet,
"shot" needle high, where mind-sense could not stay.

A mid-life crisis thwarted dreams, long-planned.
Retirement early, pensioned to a pall.
His nest egg cracked and splattered in the fall -
they combed his life (and hairline) strand by strand.

Wrap, late, the withered body with cool care;
enclose with common courtesies, grown cold.
Disguise old pavement winters in firm hold
and stub your view, so you don't have to stare.

WALLED GARDEN, FELBRIGG

Mature fruit in the apple orchard,
skies blue as endless summer.
Neptune's cherub poses,
harmless in a pond,
where lavender yet blooms.
No crooning from the dovecote's aged red bricks,
while vegetables are fat for harvesting
before first winter frosts.

A bloom of agapanthus skies
and angel's trumpets in the greenhouse.
Just gently snaking breeze
of naked ladies blooming bare and pink.
Geraniums in second flush,
fuschias tall as trees.
Cabbage whites flit caryopteris airs,
while pensioners slow to a long-gone age;
yet fast as humans, fast as fall,
and always like a Noah's Ark, in pairs.

Geese arch to church-migrating shapes,
into a storm of popes and formless fears.
Silent jets spike the sky,
to seashell echoes of a distant war.
One stray dragonfly dances light-stormed peace;
too soon, gone.
An echolalic child lifts laughter into air,
as windfalls stray and bruise on verdant lawn.

LATE FALL

Season of goodbyes
long shadows
short fall

heaven's warm-sprung
oak-bright Virginia creeper,
forsythia pales to bare

last sun plays with us,
skin warms ageing spots
shoots spindles too soon
shivering past

IN DEFENCE OF THE SPIDER

I should not defend a spider,
whose work weaves misspellings of my name,
or write a knitting pattern of their web
so all may laugh and scurry in the dark
to corners full of eyes and wriggly legs.

I will not defend arachnoid might
in pretty diamonds of misty dawn
through fountain grass or cordyline that frames
circular knitting needles:
her eight-brained flexi-limbs.

Simply, I'll knit and purl as Charlotte intertwines,
completes her row and wraps her sweater close,
to stuff it, safely, far from human feet
predict her body's slipping dust beside
new running mites that hide such legs and eyes.

A pig, her life, she is too weak to eat
and for a children's tale she has to talk,
to save a suckling from man's roasting spit.
She lights the stage and spins with grace
and in her death-throes breathes humanity.

Though 'pigs can fly' no more,
she taught us with eight feet
how spiders die.

SHOPPING SLUGS AND SNAILS

She carried the whole world on her shoulders
and I could not imagine
what she had packed so fat, so full, so small
as a snail trail
doubled up with the weight of the world
like some tribal matron
motioning humanity to pause and stare

She carried the whole world on her shoulders
and little in her hands
where shoppers carried so many bags
like slugs' trails home to rest
beneath stones, plant pots, empty watering cans.
Yet this snail must find somewhere
dry and warm and free from crushing feet
or prods to move, move on
She slugged it with her bags at shopping time
her whole world on her shoulders
to find no frost at night, nor frosty glares

ENVIRONMENTAL

Brightest in your green world,
standing out proud in pillar-box red.
No need for disguise as you prey
on tasty leaves to undarn pure-dyed epiderm
to lace.

You feast on the finest tables,
laundered linen, dyed green aperitif,
until you run, clicking rudely
at your predators.
Pouring the contents of your bowels
to scorch a habitat black,
where mites foul nursery for the upper leaves
and crown pubescence,
budding new romance
in a fleur-de-lis of power.

Blood, you shine like poison berries,
and I name you, Lily Beetle:
You are Man.

PAINT ME A SUNFLOWER IN THE SKY

The sun is here as the day ends.
It is present in the alarm of birds
flitting urgently before dark,
it is hanging in the light and air,
damp with expectation of night.
The dog worries at the fence;
the cat's been rolling around on warm paving stones
and wood pigeons huddle together on a high branch.
Herrings spread, break up and all of heaven glisters
in the glower of muscari, heady with scent.
Twin trails of a plane, glinting high in a blue sky,
darting silently in slow motion.
It is evening time, and angels gather,
floating above my garden.
There, in the glistering time,
the peace of silence chills towards dark
and nothing like a sunflower's in the sky.
Nothing so bright, so clear, so beautiful
as all creation loudly saying, Amen.

MOTHER'S GARDEN

It's summer now, the garden's in full bloom,
the colours rich and vibrant, growing wild.
Here you belonged, outside, not in some room
grown dull where electricity's so mild.

All year I see you; every moment gone,
in twilight just beyond the garden fence.
Your secateurs and trowel put down, now done
in this place – out of sight – yet every sense

Says you are here: in hearts and fragrant flowers,
in morning sunshine, rain and storm and peace.
Time moves by shades, or sundial's sun-kissed hours,
except in darkest moonshine when dreams cease.

Goodbye, and then tomorrow, petals fall,
as new ones scent and open where birds call.

A QUIET AFTERNOON BEE

Oh, it's a wonderful time just to be,
I can't wait for the scent of sweet flowers.
Only then you will see my great powers,
oh, it's the sweetest temptation – that's me.

Ah, I'm abuzz with this fertile sense-mess,
you'll be dribbling and powerless to please.

Will you ever start asking me less?
Now I'm bumbling around just to tease.

Nothing better, on a quiet afternoon,
than a bee in the sunshine in June.

BLUETIT EASTER

I held him in my hand: such vivid shade
dimmed now; for the light had left his eyes.
No twitch nor flutter, not the slightest breath.
Such perfect beak, no birdsong could assuage
the grief to see, to hold; no feline prey
cast marks across his feathers' perfect form.
The earth was less, and heaven closer, yet
that blue of Easter skies could Notre Dame
flames of gargoyle hell-razed Holy Week.
I wish for floribundant shades of tears:
then, only then, for monstrance phoenix lift,
clouding with Unknowing doves of peace.
For me, fresh clutch of nestling eggs in down,
and flutter darts and feeds in heaven's green.

TREE DREAMS WINTER

It's simply autumn now, I tree the future bright
with snow and glowing light and warmth and peace
flitting in my branches, splashing red:
my blood – the bird's – it's beating, flushing through
my veins, greeting thin air, I'm stretched so taut.

It's getting darker now, as winter comes,
I don't want to be left alone and hard.
Come, feathered friends, flit in and out, around
my rings beneath the soil, my roots spread wide.

Tree am I, a tree can never die,
but living through the flames which warm the earth.
My words are paper-dead, they flutter down
around my ground, while waiting rousing rain.
One day, brash yellows, purple/orange/white,
will rise and chatter chill to tickle tootsies.
I stretch down/out, beyond the winter chill,
awaiting rising sap within these bones.
Can dry bones live?
As dust, they rise up tall.

Yet pause a while, my Narnia dreams in rooms,
up in the attic, where all doors enchant.
Wrap me in living furs, that move and burrow,
breathing warming airs around my twigs.

I'm twitching now, to flutter butterflies,
until they creep and crawl and munch and climb.
I'm feeding all the earth, I'm emerald bright,
and pray for blooming colours – 50 shades –
to marry sap to petal/sepal/fruitspawn
and then, one day, beyond my wildest dreams
they drop
they fall
they squidge
they seem to die.

And one day – these, my infants laugh me proud.
Oh, then, I shall fall; happy.

A PAIR OF CEDAR WAXWINGS
[David Attenborough fan page]
Reach/2023-09/Issue 296

'I was the shadow of the waxwing slain
By the false azure in the window pane'
Vladimir Nabokov

A cedar waxwing took my breath away:
from cottage pane, just yesterday, a sound…
the fallen bird had died without delay.
I looked, I saw, and then I turned around.

From cottage pane, just yesterday, a sound,
he hit the window, fell to deck and died.
I looked, I saw and then I turned around,
his mate hopped over, laid down there beside.

He hit the window, fell to deck and died;
his partner – head to head – passed, spirit-bright.
His mate; hopped over, laid down there beside,
closed eyes and passed. Emotions and insight.

His partner head to head, passed spirit-bright;
the sadness, beauty, privilege… a moment,
closed eyes and passed. Emotions and insight.
Proof of nature's witness has now opened.

The sadness, beauty; privilege. A moment
the fallen bird had died without delay.
Proof of nature's witness has now opened,
a cedar waxwing took my breath away.

A PERFECT SUMMER'S DAY TOO SOON

Lothlorien/2024-05/ONLINE

Sleeping. What is sleeping? What is sleep?
Drop; no.
Wake, I'm awake. It's too early to fall
ache, arms; ache, neck; woolly head
matchstick eyes.

Too early for lunch; too early for drink;
I'm awake.
Why? Would sleep alter the landscape?
There are shades that never appear in Spring
and birds are busybusybusynesting.
Pigeons, like drunken women, assault the nectar
dripping from the flowers.
Ants are at work. Everything has purpose.
Bunnies staring, after pellets of endless eggs;
is life all shite for chickens, first, or six packs?
Pity nurses, planning their lay in the garden
(for screaming infants demanding chocolate).
The sky is haemorrhaging a darkest red;
sun-pops like NYPD and actors pretending
to ignore crowds of touts and fun-lovers.
I will sleep when my loved one is in my arms
again. Off to the Garden Centre without a car.
Raining, endless raining; matchstick eyes.
How will Grandad sleep, now Grandma's gone?

AMID DAFFODILS, IN CLOUD CUCKOO LAND
Lothlorien Blog/2024-10/ONLINE

Spring-Cleaning disjointed September, no feral
barking of Pre-School, Post-School clubs and socials.
New house garden, deep in building debris,
years of composting, peat-rich to shrub a lawn
from wispy clouds

of daffodils. Eat your heart in, Wordsworth, nothing
danced December but Wartime bombs,
rediscovered and disposed of in the Press. Faint cuckoo,
crows and neighbourhood catfights,
breeding among scrub after dark. Play chicken
on garage roof, watch drunken foxy
prowling at noon,
high on…? Youthfulness. Thunderous clouds.
Splatted like Kentucky Fried
on estate road in deep snow. Phantasms of reigning Reynard,
a dandelion in his jaw.
You realise, don't you, students drink, leave home,
fail to text.
Regrettably, Cuckoo Clock announces 12:
stop dancing, William. RIP.

AUTUMNITY IN A GARDEN

Dreich Magazine/2023-07/Season 6 Issue 8

The pear tree's miserable, its leaves turned brown
to sleep until sweet blossom into Spring.
Chrysanthemum is heaven, sunshine orange,
no jewel, nor diadem, a woolly pom-pom hat.
Kale lords it – with fresh undies - caterpillars flown;
radicchio's red cobweb veins/green leaves.
Choisya, always, now like stars they shine,
as yellow florets thrust towards thin sky.
The stems of cornus glow red, leaves of gold,

as tiny buds await to herald Spring.
Grace of Amelanchier: even death becomes her
(blushing to be mistaken for a cherry).
Fuschia in full bloom; green leaves/red stems;
groundcover daisy leaves of plant (unknown).
A twig from Goat's Beard, die-back, space laid bare;
red heuchera (and yellow, orange, purple).

The apple's indecisive, mottled shades
of yellow, orange, brown and speckled green.
Pyrocantha's glory crown of thorns,
like sunset on the sea's long winter flood.
Gingko Bilupa's regency? Autumn fall,
from emerald to gold (or green to yellow).
Prunus ruby leaves glow Aretha hymns,
as flimsy trembling groundcover blushes purple.
A brown twig (dead), it's nothing now; nor ever;
that hebe branch burnt through long heatwave Summer.
No sadder fernery than broken fronds
of endless drought; no crown – just, to survive.
The Kentish Belle (not hardy): it's survived,
smothered with orange blossom into November.
Euonymus, rosemary and box:
green/variegated/evergreen, they rise,

Unidentifiable, the waste of rain,
damp fogs, and fires indoors to blaze and bloom.

BEE SPARKING ASHES
Lothlorien/Vol 28/2023

It's Winter Solstice, nothing's pushing
through the sod, irritating human spirits into pearls
snowdrops stay in bed all year.
Crocus crowns in gold or white or purple
to Candlemas Saint Valentine by heart
simply waiting time.
Spring Equinox, Narcissi-fresh, lightening sky
pooled idiots admire reflections
many cousin shades of blossom.
Tulip season, jewels breed a crown
human parties spread like wakes
time to dance.
Beltane flags hoisted, roots spread damp mud
Oriental poppies on strike, Californian wilds breed
feral orange seeds to earth.
Summer Solstice greens rage on
Delphiniums dahlias, begonias sulk
Seeds setting, nights draw round.
Samhain preys late Autumn delights
sedums, agapanthus, asters, chrysanths
hide absences in perennial beds.
Winter Solstice hurries to closure
naked ladies, pyrocantha berries, thorns
mandrake falls.
Sleep winter warm in vivid hues of stars
full moon, root Yggdrasil's tree upside-down
Strike Yule flame; spark Phoenix bees from ashes.

CORE OF WINTER

Shadow hand on page,
unlike Adam in Sistine Chapel,
or God. Black holes everywhere,
apple cores asking nibbles
as bonfires burn outrage damply.
No frosty night for winter walking
in the air. Broken. Days gone.
Compost and rain. Shall I compare you
to leaf fall? Jam? No Jerusalem
awaits Melchizedek.
Even the Queen holds no card
nor telegram. Camilla, for those
who can remember Mrs Simpson.
Sweet evergreens buried and blooming,
blending frozen store
of pickled dark. It's cold to shoot at the stars,
snow festive fun among bruised round conifers.
Full of melted gales and ripe days.
Recycled, phantom brown and brave as Hygge,
ripe for rosy stories: of seeds winning.

EDEN: BIRDS AND BEER

Lothlorien Vol 21/2023-04

The garden is simply beautiful now,
full of vibrant hope (a Platinum spell).
The crow/rook/jackdaw/pigeon speak of hell.

I pray for bluetit/robin/wren, and how
these sunshine days are passing by so slow.
One Mother (in her cell) might say, *'All's Well…'*
as women writers/Anchorites still tell,
there's nothing beyond Eden. Time to mow,

your seeded plugs are in the Veg Plot. Watch
that heaven's not for slugs nor snails nor earwigs.
Drown them in beer or salt, else (cruellest-kind),
environmental pasta's coloured swatch
hidden beneath the sod of sweet earth-gigs.
Radiant rainbows blossom for humankind.

GREEN SUMMER AND MOONSHINE IN THE FLOWER

[Inspired by When I am Gone, Mosiah Lyman Hancock]

This journey's full of laughter in the moon,
A dusty, winding, scratchy route, off grid.
There's starshine, perfect blossom's fall too soon,
night's rose-pressed pages scent as thorns are slid.

A dusty, winding, scratchy route off grid,
no sunshine-yellow fun, for none forget.
night's rose-pressed pages scent as thorns are slid.
Green summer, red cheek laughter, with regret.

No sunshine-yellow fun, for none forget,
special moments; places; dreams of Springtime.
Green summer, red-cheek laughter with regret,
joys and sorrows round the table's home-time.

Special moments, places, dreams of Springtime,
sad sunsets leave the warmth of that last smile.
Joys and sorrows round the table's home-time,
remembrance: precious bud, to pause awhile.

Sad sunsets leave the warmth of that last smile,
there's starshine, perfect blossom's fall too soon.
Remembrance-precious buds, to pause awhile,
this journey's full of laughter in the moon,

LATE SUMMER 2023
FORTHEMANY/Vol 33/2023-12

ginormous whales spread surf of cotton wool
their outfits Broderie Anglaise edged in smut
tractor flashing warning lights with cones
the sun's disturbed from beaming behind its cloak

trees depressed in shadows huddle down
mirroring that pewter froth above
cruise-tides of radio waves are moving on
late windmills sail the past where tourists follow

the harvester's consuming fields of corn
chaff spuming out its rear in clouds of smoke
stubble-tender underfoot the sky
a perfect shade of summer frock with frills

Ukrainian/Russian news storms endlessly;
nursing wounds back home like cotton wool.

LIGHT FALLS, SEDUMS RISE

Wildfire Words/2023-10 Leaves and Leaving

Is September the cruellest month?
greeting us with hope that lasts all year
provisions of Eden's garden best
flooding memory with scents and sights
of dying glory, like a bird hitting the glass
to lie down and die
seasonal craft fayres, gift ideas
luxury treats to wrap and keep
for family scattered far as a postman's sack

For me, it's birthdays wrapped in nostalgic parcels
inside my brain
tears and sighs where children play
dahlias glowing flash shades of dying
reliable asters gently gleaming
stars' universe inside each sedum bloom
apples falling from trees promising future blossom

as drunken wasps die happy
robin's full stop eyes as feet land on spade
breast glowing like pyrocantha berries
waiting the rewarding worm

Closing living room curtains
completing last jobs before serious wind fall
putting away tools, bringing plants inside
turning up heating at night
harvesting squash and sweetcorn
sitting with a cuppa to watch last light
of earlier heat cool down to night.
Happy Birthday, World, its Michaelmas Education.

LOVE YOUR GARDENER

FORTHEMANY Vol 29/2023-04/BOOK

My sad unloved face has come out to play,
and while I love my garden, Mr T
speaks reassuringly on rainy day.
The sound, the look, the bum: this pleases me

and, while I love my garden, Mr T,
he knows his stuff and how to rearrange
the sound, the look. The bum! This pleases me.
Let him spend a fortune; there at the Grange,

he knows his stuff and how to rearrange
colours, plants and seasons, like weather's died.
Let him spend a fortune there, at the Grange;
plenty's eye candy, equipment supplied.

Colours plants and seasons, like weather's died.
Speaks reassuringly on rainy day,
plenty's eye candy. Equipment supplied!
My sad unloved face has come out to play.

NOVEMBER SHADES TO WINTER

Dawntreader/2025-01/Issue 69

November is the saddest month to rain.
Bones leach greedy night from cheerful sunshine,
so haunting in remembrance its refrain.
Time calls to hunker down with warming wine.

Bones leach greedy night from cheerful sunshine,
a shiver brushes last-remaindered leaves.
Time calls to hunker down with warming wine,
hot coals of flowers sag as wind-sweep weaves.

A shiver brushes last-remaindered leaves,
dreich crows and pigeons drop down damp to feed.
Hot coals of flowers sag as wind-sweep weaves,
trees tremble as sap chills to earth to bleed.

Dreich crows and pigeons drop down damp to feed,
first crimson flash on garden fence alights.
Trees tremble as sap chills to earth to bleed
red skies in winter shades and bonfire brights.

First crimson flash on garden fence alights,
so haunting in remembrance its refrain.
Red skies in winter shades and bonfire brights,
November is the saddest month to reign.

SHALL I COMPARE YOUR BLOSSOM?

Littoral/2024-01 Candlemas

The pear is white and does not think to blush. It is the perfect earliest embodiment of fruit, scenting summer days to Autumn's bounty. The tree is smothered like surfers on the tide in Tenerife, where one brave blossom thrusts across the rip, then vanishes into the surf, wave on wave. There is no beginning and no end, until night falls. Heat cools to loud music drumming and marching in youthful dress. Nothing arrives before the pear, its greenery forgotten until the dance of honeybees. Hoverflies. Bluetits. All life wishes to scent its innocence, as if it fell forever, confetti where the church bells ring. One day, smothered in buds. Next day – apparently – the staring sickness as the best beloved in the garden sweeps in, magniloquent. How soon its discarded

among the full orchestra stepping onstage, taking their seats, prepping instruments, hums and twangs and rustle of scores. None settled in the garden, it cannot grieve the snowdrop that came first. Forgotten as soon as apple blossom scents nearby, blushing like the Birth of Venus in her scallop shell. Except, it doesn't, proudly oblivious and raging bee-struck nectar. Silently then, like a star on some Winter night in a Roman backwater, its flower falls unnoticed. A small swelling of life pointing to the sky, surprisingly recognisable by shape and shade. Imperceptibly, it leans towards earth, hidden by expanding green on every twig. Thick with summer fulfilment, it fattens until those leaves are smutty and overstretched. One day it drops unnoticed, or plucked by the gardener to glow in a week's last sunshine. Simmered, bottled, eaten or frozen, those left to Winter's frost dissolve among ecstatic wassps. One day, maybe, some seed sprouts to take its chances beyond home boughs. Mother wears her finest dress and pearls; fresh as Spring for many years.

GARDEN THERAPY

Amateur Gardening/2023-10-14th

Gardening's therapeutic,
gardening is fun.
There's always more 'Keep Busy',
work is never done.
Except, it's so enjoyable,
always more to please.
I would be outdoors longer
if I didn't wheeze and sneeze.
I've learnt the art of waiting
for every bloom to burst.
Those that failed last Winter,
grieving them's the worst.
I planted for the heatwave,
endless downpours sent.
Such temperamental blossoms
to soggy pulp all-spent.
Perennials forgetting
it's Summer – honest – now;
evergreens like deadwood,
no corms a plucky Wow!
Yet, patiently I'm winning,
there's colour-bursts all year.
Those brave survivors, stunning,
thrill my heart with cheer.
If all else fails, there's Alan
and I'm inclined to watch

every Gardening programme
indoors, on the Box.
Yet I am not disheartened,
glory fills my trolley:
Garden Centre's treat-time,
keeping beds bright and jolly.
In comfy garden seat I sit
with a morning cuppa;
jump up pronto when I see
that slimy slug's a whopper.
Aches and pains delay my route,
admiring what I've tended.
Gardening's therapeutic
when disasters have been mended.

TREATS FOR YOUR GARDENER

I'm assuming here, that the gardener is you/or a family member. However, if you are lucky enough to find a gardener that will 'Do'… look after them well. They are rare. Give them space to work; don't forget a cuppa and biscuit (or whatever). Don't leave hazards for them to trip over; or ferocious beasts guarding their territory. Especially be careful if the gardener happens to be a tree surgeon. If you choose the latter, please ensure they are well-trained; you must have seen the cartoon of, um, them sat with power tool on branch, sawing away their own support…

Circuit breakers if you use electric tools in the garden; or cordless.

Apart from these essentials, your loved ones will delight in how easy you are to please for birthdays and Christmas:

Garden gift vouchers
Magazine subscription
Little foldaway outdoor table
Fresh pair of secateurs
A box of mixed spring bulbs
Gardener's Yearbooks
Gardening gloves
Mugs with pictures of gardeners/gardens

Colourful plant pots
Packs of unusual grow-your-own seeds
Massive indoor temperamental plants
Ornaments or mirrors for the garden
Stone/slate/wooden planters
Self-watering hanging baskets
Potting table
Cold frame
New system for seeds and pricking out
Bottle of something/anything from the Garden Centre
Jigsaw puzzles of perfect gardens
Gift vouchers for a Gardening Show/or Gardens across the country
Coffee table books on Gardening, that remain precisely there (on the coffee table)
Useful or lethal gadgets (you may have no idea how to use in your treasured plot)
Sundancers
Wind chimes
Flowery labels for your wheelie bin
A wormery
A kneeler

(For the uninitiated, kiss the gifter for thoughtfulness; those with a sitting/and kneeling position are best, preferably with a drawer for all your bits, secateurs, labels and twine included).

BEST TIPPLE FOR THE GARDENER IN YOUR LIFE (not advised for hired help)

1. Gin flavoured with anything you grow (sloe, damson, rosemary, they're called 'Botanicals').
2. Wine (preferably home-grown from your own fruit; failing that, red or white, avoid fizz: you don't want any drunken wasps in your garden).
3. Mocktail with rose petals (or other edibles) floating on top.
4. Any drink using blueberries (for colour), raspberries, strawberries. Oh, go on, include Prosecco after dusk.
5. Beer (not in cans for curious wasps to discover).
6. Anything involving apples/pears/gooseberries/or whatever else you grow.
7. Home-grown lemonade? Bear in mind you need a good conservatory/or heat for orange or lemon trees. No matter how pretty they look in the Garden Centre, do make allowances for your skill and space.
8. Cuppa tea (or coffee) for that first brew of the day; you are still working, looking at your garden and wondering what job needs doing next. You will never run out of tasks.

CHECK LIST OF ESSENTIAL TOOLS

1. Trowel (narrow-edge also useful)
2. Secateurs (trial and error!)
3. Shears (Well-oiled, better still a cordless hedgetrimmer, but shears for the rest of the garden tidy-up)
4. Spade (Not too heavy, comfortable)
5. Rake (Some implements have replaceable heads and unscrew, fiddly but useful)
6. Edger (for trim lawn edgings, or you can just use a spade, or let grass cover paving)
7. Broom (tough outdoor bristles, there are other wire-brush type brooms to keep weeds at bay)
8. Saw (some are folding with safety features, but saw through a decent thickness)
9. Loppers (for pruning quite thick stems)
10. Long-armed shears (for reaching those parts)
11. Dibber (measured holes to fit plug plants)
12. Garden twine or ties (for plants that need support)
13. Bamboo canes (for those runner beans or tomato plants)
14. Supports (allsorts for different plants, before plants fall over; practise makes…)
15. Tops for canes (to save your eyesight, guaranteed you will not notice canes when you bend or stretch)
16. Lawn mower (or scythe… beware!)

FLOWERS TO INSPIRE YOU!

Spring bulbs – any spring bulbs – every Superstore or DIY store will try to tempt you in Autumn. Plant up, put outdoors in a corner somewhere and forget about them until Spring. A label may help, otherwise you have a guessing game when shoots emerge. But tulips are best planted near the end of year. Fill gaps in your borders with a well-placed tub.

Pansies and violas – Garden Centres and many other outlets will try very hard to make you buy them, just be careful which size plug plant they are – if they look weedy or dried out, avoid.

Geraniums (or Perlagoniums – same difference, one's hardy, one isn't). Flower for months; the fancy delicate ones may take longer to get going.

Cineraria – silver leaves to fill up space, they grow big and may survive winter.

Euonymus – evergreen/in lots of shades, grow well, take tough conditions, just water them occasionally.

Day lilies – each bloom lasts a day, repeat flowerers for months, come back next year!

Dogwood (cornus) – tough as old boots, grown for the glowing stems through winter; choose well and you may also enjoy the leaf colour and everything else about them!

Choisya (Mexican orange blossom) – until last winter, I swore they were perfect! Evergreen, yellow or bottle green leaves, lovely Spring blossom, all-weathers, easy to trim, hedge-worthy perfect. Then we had a massive heatwave, followed by extensive frost… they died enmasse. Every plant has its limits.

Lavender easy-peasy, bees love them; useful for gift ideas home-grown. Many varieties, some hardier than others, take dry conditions. Scented!

Cosmos, annual, deadhead regularly to prolong flowering, lots of colours. Plugs from the Garden Centre easiest. Improves any poor display.

Salvia 'Hot Lips', flowers for months, spreads everywhere, bees love them, can be transplanted around the garden. Other varieties, some delicate.

Paeony for blowsy late-Spring blooms; but you will need to add support before they fall over and long before they bloom. Less fussy than roses for that fast feel-good 'I grew this!'.

Lupins, lots of shades, to uplift you after Spring bulbs have died back and before big summer flowers have caught up. They're tall and striking and make you feel you're doing something right! Forget about the terrible attraction they are to mildew or greenfly after that first flush. If you cut each tall flower when its finished, more will follow (smaller, but hey, bess still love them). Do what you can to keep them looking presentable! They will return, reliably, year on year.

Asters, not everywhere sells them, or makes them easy to find, but the Michaelmas daisy is a godsend when your blowsy blooms are dying back. Lovely glow of blue or cerese or purple. Nothing beats them.

Sedums, excellent Autumn colour, reliably back every year and they will spread.

If you find (seeds or plugs) Aquilegia 'Grannies Bonnets' or Nigella 'Love in a Mist' or Verbena (tall variety), each is delightful and will self-seed. Marigolds (for insects, to distract from munching your veggies). Sunflowers (for height; leave seedheads for the birds in winter).

Not forgetting Green Manure, just scatter the seeds after you have dug over your veg plot, it returns nitrogen to the soil and looks pretty as well.

SILLY QUESTIONS WITHOUT ANSWERS

1. Can you wear Grannies Bonnets?
2. If potatoes can be First Earlies, are some called Night Hawks?
3. Is there any truth in the rumours around Full Moon, and do gardeners listen?
4. What's the difference between a Christmas Rose and a Lenten Rose?
5. Why are daffodils inspired by Narcissus?
6. Do sunflowers ever get a crick in the neck, from following the sun?
7. Why do slugs and snails know all the best plants and how can you dispose of them humanely?
8. Do wasps have their uses in Spring?
9. Are bumbles as sensible as honey bees?
10. How can birds tell when there will be a food supply for their young?
11. Why do cats hide in plain sight beneath bird feeders?
12. Can pigeons judge speed and distance?
13. Do runner beans ever run away, and why do other plants 'run to seed'?
14. What's the first thing a gardener does after they sit down (apart from that cuppa)?
15. Why is observing your garden regularly so important?
16. Why does the hedgehog cross the road?

17. Why don't we grow Adam's apples?
18. What/who first discovered cider?
19. What does the partridge know (that we don't) about the pear tree?
20. Does the robin only eat red berries for his breast? Are females/males the same?
21. What do caterpillars eat, and are they ever surrounded by soporific smoke?
22. If lettuces are also soporific, why didn't Mr Rabbit get caught?
23. Can a gardener be a writer (or poet), and is it ever wise?
24. Can musicians, or painters, be writers/poets; and which suffers first? (Garden/Gardener, Painting/Garden, Lyrics/Flowers)
25. If you could choose just one evergreen, perennial, and annual, what would each be?
26. Can you garden without a lawn?
27. How many pineapples grow from one plant?
28. What plants would die if you took a holiday and do you have a contingency plan?
29. If you had to be Mastermind for just one plant, what would it be?
30. A Garden Centre to a G_____ is like a Sweetie Shop to a C_____.

If you want a sillier Quiz, just read labels of plants – lots of them! Then wonder how names were chosen.

There are many other enhancements for your garden: from hot tubs to water fountains, stepping stones or arches, arbour seats, old telephone boxes. Whatever you choose, consider where you live and what is safe to leave outside. Gnomes have been known to go on holidays and send postcards! Herons love fish in ponds. Dragonflies may breed in the smallest of water sources in your garden.

Some wildlife decides that your home is the Des Res, so be careful what you encourage where. Spiders are usually experts at catching those flies. But there are ways to discourage pests; or helpline numbers for pest control. I've heard many comic scenarios; but only after the event.

Time to discover your own wild world outside your door!

ALSO ON OBOOKO

20 Tips to Keep Editors Happy Revisited
Best Laid Plans (Vol 1&2) – short stories
Angels' Wings and Stars – poems of stars and grief
Nature and Flowers – wild poems
Norfolk's Beautiful Child – diagnosis

Wendy also has many poems published in print magazines; and also online through various writers' groups.
Many of the poems have been individually published in print magazines in the UK and, or, in various collections by theme. This mix was chosen especially for the gardener, explaining many gardening tips that don't require anything more wordy. If I had the skill, there would be cartoon drawings throughout this Gardening hobby guide. As for photographs of flowers – hundreds!