



# California Gardeners' Club

## Newsletter April 2020

[www.californiagardenersclub.co.uk](http://www.californiagardenersclub.co.uk)

### Things to remember

1. Our next meeting scheduled for the 6<sup>th</sup> April **is cancelled**
2. Trading Hut - not a lot to say re Trading except the Hut is closed until further notice – which basically will be when the Govt. ease the current 'stay at home' restrictions and permit other shops (eg garden centres) to re-open.
3. Tool sharpening scheduled for the 28<sup>th</sup> March **is cancelled**
4. Did you know you can renew electronically now? See newsletter for details.
5. Badger watch **is cancelled**

During the current coronavirus outbreak, I am reminded of how we gardeners coped in a previous crisis.

One of the books I treasure is my late father's copy of Mr. Middleton's Garden Book. It was first published in 1941.

C.H.Middleton was born in Weston by Weedon, Northamptonshire in 1886. Gardening was his family trade. His father was employed as Head Gardener at Weston Hall by Sir George Sitwell, father of Edith, one of the three children of the famous Sacheverell family.

After leaving school C.H. Middleton, known by his Christian name Cecil, went to work initially in the seed trade. He then spent time at Kew Gardens.



Initially recommended to the BBC by the then secretary of the RHS, he began his broadcasting career in the 1930's. This career included presenting 'In Your Garden' on television in 1936 – surely the first gardening programme ever to be televised. However, it was his radio broadcasts for which he gained real fame.

By 1940 he was attracting some 3.5 million listeners. His fifteen minute talks were very successful and were published in book form (price two and sixpence) .

He figured prominently in the government inspired 'Dig for Victory campaign' during the second World War.

For many years he wrote the popular illustrated 'Adam the Gardener' strip which appeared in the Daily Express.

His relations with the BBC were not always cordial. When broadcasts were largely carried out live, he sometimes caused controversy. On one occasion, in relation to the extensive damage imposed by the German bombing, he remarked on the ready availability of mortar rubble for liming the soil prior to planting. This certainly would not have gone down well in these politically correct times. Cont. overleaf.

His advice was adventurous as well as very practical. In a 1940 broadcast he suggested that gardeners should sow a row of garlic!

Mr Middleton, as everybody knew him, provided an enormous amount of help to gardeners in their efforts to achieve a degree of self-sufficiency in difficult times.

One thing in particular which attracted me to him, was his statement that although he wrote much about vegetable growing, he was really a man of flowers. He once remarked that 'he could not love an onion where a dahlia might grow'. Wise words indeed!

Ian Gillott  
Deputy Chairman

### **Home Delivery**

Henry Street are delivering compost and a few other items to selected post codes. They open their website, take 500 orders and then close it again, so you have to catch it open. There is no guarantee of when they will deliver but one of our members ordered on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March and it arrived Monday 30<sup>th</sup>. They were very safe, keeping their distance and wearing gloves

We have also heard that Blue Diamond Garden Centre at Redfields in Fleet are operating a delivery service. One of our committee made an order and it arrived. If you are in desperate need of garden products then it may be worth a call (01252 624444).

### **Topical Tip – February 2020**

This month's tip is one which the excellent Ray Broughton gave when he talked to the club last year. It concerns the task of renewing those bare patches which frequently appear on our lawns – especially after a hot summer.

The usual method of dealing with these areas involves raking the affected area and putting down some grass seed to feed the pigeons!



Ray's tip is to put some sifted soil into a wheelbarrow and mix in two or three handfuls of good quality grass seed. Make sure the soil is damp and place in a black polythene sack (not the wheelbarrow) and put in a cool greenhouse or garden shed. After four or five days, the seed will have germinated. Remove the soil and chitted seed and place it on the bare patches. (I put the soil in a coarse sieve before applying it as shaking it over the patches ensures even distribution.) Then, pray for some April showers to help the seed grow! This method really works - it is a really good tip.

Ian Gillott  
Deputy Chairman

### **Toilet roll shortage**

A lady friend of ours who is 88 years young said to her son "what's wrong with newspaper squares and string", he replied, what's the string for?? Generation gap. eh?

## Membership

### ***Did you know you can renew electronically?***

Just transfer your £5 (£10 for a couple) to the clubs account giving your surname and initials as the reference. Your membership card will then be waiting for you at the next meeting.

**Clubs account number is – 71301608 & sort code – 404709**

Now it's the start of a new year, why not have a chat with your neighbours and tell them about our gardening club. Gardening clubs, all over the country, are folding due to lack of members. Is it because new houses are being built with smaller gardens or is it that younger people aren't interested or are too busy to garden? Who knows the real answer? Our club is no different. Thirty years ago, our membership was around 450 (no, that was not a typing error – 450). Last year we lost a few members due to relocation and health reasons but thankfully gained a few new members. This kept our membership at 111. Our ideal number would be 150 but we know we can't get there without your help. Pass the word around. Tell people you will bring them to their first meeting. Don't keep it a secret.

## New banners for the club

What do you think of the new club banners?

In an attempt to draw more attention to the club's Spring and Summer shows, we thought something like this placed outside during show days might attract more attention.

Hope you agree, they look really good. All we need now is this Corona Virus to be eliminated from the face of the earth so we can get back to normal.



## Monthly talks

**This is a call to all members:** if you have any ideas/requests for the subjects of the monthly talks, please let us know. Either reply to this email or give Hermione a ring (number below).

## An update from the RHS communities team

We had planned to send out an email today with a range of things you could get stuck into with your communities. However, we find ourselves suddenly in quite a different world, and sadly, getting together with others – to garden or otherwise – is no longer possible.

Like other organisations around the world, the RHS has sadly had to postpone and cancel many events and competitions, including the **UK Britain in Bloom Finals** due to the ongoing threat of COVID-19.

We are also advising that anyone that has signed-up to, or planned to take part in **Grow Social** – the new RHS initiative to bring people together through gardening – postpone their activities. We very much hope that you will have a chance to bring your exciting ideas to life later in the year.

Several of the regional and national Bloom competitions have also been suspended, but please refer to the individual websites for up-to-date information in your area.

We are working hard on bringing you ideas and activities for growing at a distance, so please do stay posted for more tips, advice and inspiration.

We would love to hear how you are adapting – share your ideas for connecting with others through gardening in the age of social distancing on Twitter @RHSBloom or email [communities@rhs.org.uk](mailto:communities@rhs.org.uk)

Take care, the RHS communities team

### **Ideas for growing veg at home**

Have you ever tried growing vegetables? If not, now could be a good time to give it a try! While we are all 'confined to quarters', there is a lot that you can do at home. You do not need any specialist equipment or materials, you can use what you already have. There is a lot of produce that you can easily grow in containers. What could be better than to go out into the garden and pick a few fresh salad leaves or harvest your own vegetables?

#### Suitable containers

Have a look around and see what you have. You might decide to repurpose pots that you have used to grow your Spring bulbs, rather than giving them all over to summer bedding.

Other ideas:

- Large sized plastic flower pots.
- Old reusable shopping tote bags: snip a few holes in the bottom for drainage
- Old fruit boxes: line with plastic and make a few holes for drainage
- The plastic trays that grapes come in can be used for cut and come again salad leaves

Just use your imagination but make sure there is adequate drainage.

#### Compost

Garden centres and the trading hut are closed but some online gardening suppliers are still taking orders and will deliver compost. However, you can reuse compost that you have used for eg. your Spring bulbs. Incorporate some fertiliser to replenish it. Growmore would be ideal but just use whatever you have. You could use growbags too. Don't worry too much about whether you are doing it right. Just give it a go!

#### What to grow

These are all crops easy to grow from seed which you might need to order online. You can sow them all in situ.

- Cut and come again salad leaves or lettuce - Tip: likes to germinate in cool conditions, so sow in a shady spot if possible, then move to a warmer spot
- Radishes - a very quick crop, some ready in four weeks. Try unusual varieties, like white ones
- Spring onions Beetroot - Tip: before thinning them out, harvest the leaves of the smaller unwanted ones to use in salads
- Chard - varieties like Bright Lights mix and Rhubarb Chard are attractive plants in their own right. Tip: pick the young leaves to use in salads. Use the larger ones as a leafy vegetable. Strip the stalks from the stem and cook in boiling water. Chop the stalks and use in stir-fries.

- Pea shoots - sow peas in seed trays or shallow containers and use as a cut and come again crop. Delicious in salads, or wilted through dishes such as risotto and expensive to buy!

Others to try:

- Kohl rabi - an unusual veg that you rarely find in the shops. Easy to grow and also decorative, comes in white or purple varieties.
- Turnips - harvest when golf-ball sized
- Carrots - grow the shorter chantenay types. Longer varieties need very fine or sandy soil because whenever they come across anything in the soil, they 'fork' and you end up with some weird shapes!
- Spinach
- Rocket
- Courgette - go for a smaller variety suitable for container growing Tomatoes - if you don't have a greenhouse, choose an outdoor variety. Try a tumbling variety to grow in a hanging basket

How to grow

Sowing and thinning - follow the manufacturers instructions on the packet. When one batch has germinated, sow the next batch to ensure a continuous supply. Use the leaves of thinnings in salads or as a veg.

Position - most veg need a fairly sunny spot to do their best but will grow in partial shade and spinach prefers a shady spot.

Watering - keep well watered.

Feeding - feed tomatoes and courgettes with tomato feed when the first fruits have set.

Pests - slugs and snails will enjoy your tender leaves as much as you, so use what you can to keep them off. You can use egg shells but bake them first in the oven as you cook something else to make them more crunchy. I have read that Vaseline spread around the container as a barrier will keep them off but I haven't tried it myself! Cover carrots with fine insect mesh or fleece to keep off carrot fly.

Another idea!! Have a bit of fun and see what you can grow from your own food. For example: Apple, pear or citrus fruit pips; an avocado stone; seeds from a chilli or sweet pepper; butternut squash seeds etc. Give it a go!

Perhaps when we are able to go back to having our club meetings again, we could have a bring and show to see what you have grown from your own food!

Julia Goodall

Chairman: Dick Hawes 0118 979 3730	Hon. Treasurer: Peter Radband 07976 640989	Programmes: Hermione Lewis 0118 989 1671	Committee Member: Jayne Male
Deputy Chairman: Ian Gillott 0118 9892649	Trading Hut: Stuart Slocombe 0118 9734531	Membership: Kerry Eaton 07736 022361	Co-opted Member: Marise Radband 01344 774310
Hon. Secretary: Chris Spinks 0118 978 1432	Show Secretary: Peter Turner 0118 9730424	Committee Member: Lynn Potts 0118 977 1852	Co-opted Member: