



California Gardeners' Club

Newsletter May 2020

www.californiagardenersclub.co.uk

In 1969 I was working for the Murphy Company as a technical representative.

Murphy were well known in the retail home garden market but they also had a flourishing commercial division where they supplied crop protection products to the horticultural market.

One day, I received a telephone call from my sales manager– no email in those days – telling me that he had had a call from a Head Gardener requesting a visit by a technical representative to advise on controlling mildew and scab on his fruit trees.



My sales manager pointed out that we did not normally undertake visits to private gardens. However, it was evidently such a delightful letter that I was told that if I happened to be in the area, I could 'drop in' to the garden for ten minutes.

Drop in I most certainly did. The walled garden was situated on an estate at Chiltern Foliat, near Hungerford. The Head Gardener was a man called Harry Dodson. My visit was to result in a friendship which lasted over thirty years.

Harry was appointed as Head Gardener in 1947 when he was only twenty-nine. His remit was to look after the walled garden and to provide fresh fruit, flowers and vegetables for the 'big house.'

The garden had a large heated greenhouse, some 400 yards of cloches, numerous cold frames, a purpose built apple store and an ice house.

You may not have heard of Harry Dodson, but late in his career he became well-known as the bedrock of the television series 'The Victorian Kitchen Garden.'

Next month I will expand on my developing friendship with Harry.

Ian Gillott, Deputy Chairman

Things to remember

1. Our next meeting scheduled for the 4th May 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. Did you know you can renew electronically now? See newsletter for details.
4. **Hope everyone is safe and well. However, if you know of a club member who is lonely or needs help, please let us know and we will be happy to contact them.**

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 26th March and it arrived Monday 30th. They were very safe, keeping their distance and wearing gloves.

Squires Garden Centre at Heathlands Rd are doing home delivery, minimum order £50.

<https://www.squiresgardencentres.co.uk> They have some offers on selections of bedding plants etc.

Where do we go from here?

Following on from Julia's advice in the last newsletter Dick has asked me to investigate the potential for growing vegetables at home given that many of you don't have the equipment, or at least don't think you have. I know that many of you have those little seed pots that M&S were giving away if you spent £20 or more well here's a plan for those or any other seeds you may have.

Given that I currently have 2 allotment plots available to me, reducing my plans to a window sill or patio sized operation proved something of a challenge. So I entered my garage to find potential containers in which to begin my propagation— I am amazed at the outcome! The recycling bin alone yielded a wide array of potential containers, yoghurt pots, toilet roll innards, egg cartons, baked bean cans, milk containers, foil trays stout cardboard boxes, I even found that by wrapping newspaper around a jar I could create any size pot – I was on a roll! Best of all I figured out that 2 of those grape containers if one is inverted on top off another and taped along one edge as a hinge and a clip on the other it makes



a great window sill propagator, perfect for 3 yoghurt pots! I'm on a roll! I'm on the look out for anything in which I can drill a drainage hole, glass and pottery are out but anything else is fair game. What about the garage and the tool shed? Old sweet containers (Quality Street are the best), worn out bags for life, bits of drain pipe, compost bags, even an old pair of boots!



But, But, I hear you cry we've got no compost! I'm experimenting, I'm trying; torn up newspaper, kitchen roll, shredded paper out of the shredder and garden soil, alongside multipurpose compost. My problem is the only seeds that I had left were lettuce and some labelled Rocket (I thought they should take off ok!) but they haven't had time to germinate yet so those results next month.

If you have no seeds and fancy a bit of fun try the odd domestic potato or even a clove or 2 of garlic, no promises but you may be surprised.

You could take your daily exercise walk past your local allotments and the friendly folk down there might have surplus seeds or even some seedling surplus to their requirements – give it a try.

As someone once almost said "only grow what you can eat or is beautiful" so why do we grow so much grass?

Topical Tip – May 2020

In the late 90's I was with a group visiting the Met Office when it was located at Bracknell. One of the party asked what we could expect in respect of any alteration in weather patterns which might occur in the immediate future. The answer was 'warmer, wetter winters and colder, later springs.' To some extent, this has come to pass although we have been spoilt with a warmer and sunnier April than is normal, it is worth remembering that although it is now May, we are not out of the woods yet!



In 1935 – the year the Elvis Presley was born –there was a significant frost which occurred on the 16th and 17th of May and which caused widespread damage to tender plants.

Modern weather forecasting is pretty good these days so keep your eye on the seven-day forecasts issued either by the Met Office or on the BBC weather website.

As a rule of thumb, you should be safe planting out tomatoes and courgettes, along with seasonal bedding during the week commencing 16th of May, as we are extremely unlikely to have a repeat of the late frost which occurred some eighty-five years ago! However, if you want to be really sure, leave planting until the following week.

Ian Gillott,

Deputy Chairman



I knew I had been using the wrong throat spray. I was using Gin each evening. Now it's official, Jack Daniels five times a day. Got to be worth a try do you not think??

I started the medication today and I have been feeling great.

Stay safe

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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. 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.

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).

How often and how short should we cut the grass?

Most of us will just mow our lawns when the grass gets a little too long for our liking and cut our lawn at a height our lawnmowers are typically calibrated at - but there are some guidelines to follow if you want to make the most of your mowing and contribute to your lawns overall quality.

Our UK weather will always greatly affect the rate at which grass grows, but generally, mowing season begins in mid-March when grass starts growing again, and ends in October throughout most of the country when grass becomes dormant and is susceptible to frost.



How often?

Regular lawn mowing in growing season can greatly improve the quality of your lawn just as reducing it in periods of drought can help to protect it. Getting the balance right may seem difficult, but if you follow our rules below you should be able to keep your lawn in pristine condition.

- In spring and autumn, you should aim to mow **once a week** this allows the grass ample time to grow back.
- In summer, your grass will grow back faster, so aim to mow twice a week.
- In winter, mowing isn't usually necessary but if you feel it requires a cut - cut on the highest setting on your mower

We all can appreciate a well maintained lawn, but excessive mowing/cutting can create a nitrogen deficiency and cause grass to yellow and dry out in the sun. To prevent this from occurring, apply a SLOW RELEASE: Spring / Summer fertiliser. You can get this from the Trading Hut.

Now you know how often you should be cutting your grass, it's time to consider how tall or short you should keep it. Cont.

How short?

Generally, we all like a short and tidy lawn, however the problem with this is that we often cut far too short on the first cut and we also cut so short that the grass in our lawn can't cope with it and begins to suffer. Some grass species can tolerate closer mowing than others, and these are typically fine-leaved grasses such as fescues. Fescues are often found in ornamental / bowling green style lawns, where the recommend mowing height would be 10-20mm. For lawns that are for general use, the recommended mowing height is 20-40mm. If you try to mow shorter than this, you may hack your lawn (cut too short).

Tell-tale signs that your grass has been cut too low are that it can turn yellow / brown at the tips and appears a bit unsightly, however this may also be due to blunt blades.

For your first mow of the season (March onwards) you should put your mower on the highest setting, gradually reducing the height until it is at the recommended height for your lawn. Moving into autumn, you should increase the height on your mower so that shorter grass blades won't be susceptible to frost / disease.

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