



California Gardeners' Club

Newsletter October 2020

www.californiagardenersclub.co.uk

Autumn leaves

One aspect of 2020 has been that as a nation, we have become more attuned to nature. Along with this, is the ever-changing nature of our seasons. Autumn can bring with it a sense of nostalgia for the warmth and fullness of summer but it also has its own beauty and bounty. The kaleidoscope of changing leaf colours is at times breathtaking. I have in my garden a vitis cignetiae, a large-leaved member of the vine family. During the summer it takes a bit part as if just an extra in a play, providing a backdrop as its leaves twine along the fence and up into the oak tree behind. However in autumn, as if tired of only playing a supporting role, it suddenly takes centre stage as its leaves turn to fire, impossible to ignore its spectacular show. A true prima donna!

Why do the leaves of deciduous trees change colour in the autumn? The shortening of daylight hours and lowering temperatures prompt leaves to halt the food-making process. Chlorophyll breaks down and the green colour disappears. The yellow, pink and red pigments that have been there all along become visible and give the leaves their autumn splendour.

The actual show of colours can vary from year to year, depending on seasonal factors such as temperatures, sunshine and rain. Cold nights produce more yellow colours but if temperatures stay above freezing, leaves produce more anthocyanin which provides more of the pinks and reds. Dry weather leads to the concentration of sugars in the leaves which again produces more anthocyanin. Bright sunny days also cause more anthocyanin so again, leaves are redder.

Finally, as days continue to shorten and temperatures drop, hormones within the trees change, leaves break away from the tree and are finally blown away by the wind or fall under their own weight. Being leafless during winter has many advantages; trees can preserve the moisture in their branches and trunk and in a state of dormancy, they need less energy to stay alive. In addition, leafless trees are better able to withstand winter storms, as strong winds can move through the branches more easily.

'That is all very well,' I hear you say 'but my lawn is covered in dead leaves!' Well, you can use them to make leaf mold which makes an excellent mulch for the garden or a brilliant addition to potting compost. Plants love it! Firstly, gather up your leaves on your lawn and go over them with your lawn mower. This chops them up and helps them to break down more quickly. If you have the space, make a leaf composter from four stakes and chicken wire.

Things to remember

1. Our next meeting scheduled for the 2nd November is **cancelled**.
2. Trading Hut – the Hut will **NOT open on Sunday 18th October** but instead will be **open on Monday 19th October from 2.00 – 3.00 p.m.** After this there will then be two further Sunday morning openings 11.00 – 12.00 on the 25th October and the 1st November. The Hut will then close for the Winter
3. **Please note the Tool Sharpening event on 1st November.**

Leaves need air in order to break down. Alternatively, take some stout bin bags, fill with leaves, secure the tops and then use a sharp stick to punch holes in the bags in order to let in air. You can then pile up the bags on top of each other, making sure that each bag has access to air holes. It will take several years for the leaves to rot down but it is well worth it.

A few more seasonal tips for November:

- Raise pot plants in order to stop them getting waterlogged over the winter. Buy pot feet from garden centres or use plastic milk bottle tops.
- Clear faded annuals if not already done. Pot up pelargoniums (summer geraniums) and bring inside or into a greenhouse. They may well survive until next year.
- Tulip bulbs are planted now in borders to avoid tulip fire disease. Cover them with soil twice their depth.
- Protect more tender plants such as agapanthus, by covering with a layer of mulch. If they are in pots, bring into the greenhouse or inside. If that is not possible, move to a sunny wall and consider covering with fleece. Protect the pot too so that the soil does not freeze.
- November is a good time to plant bare root roses, trees and shrubs before the soil gets really cold.
- Aerate your lawn and give a final cut with the blade set high.

Julia Goodall

Topical Tip – October 2020

Sadly, as the summer has now made way for autumn, we can expect colder nights, some of which will sadly be accompanied by early frosts. Tender plants such as dahlias will be amongst the first plants to suffer.

As soon as the foliage of dahlias is completely blackened, the dead foliage can be cut down to ground level.

The usual advice for looking after the tubers is to lift them, wash them, and when they have dried out, store in a frost-proof place. This is all very well if you have a few plants. I have over sixty plants and there is no way I am going to lift and store them all!

I cover the majority of the tubers with a thick layer of compost - around 4-5 inches deep – and unless we get a really penetrating frost, these will survive and will start to re-grow in the spring. The exception to this are the few plants I want to sprout early in the spring and from these I will take cuttings.. I am lucky enough to have a small, cold greenhouse. I dig a trench in the soil and after placing the tubers at the bottom of the trench, I cover them with soil. If you have not got a greenhouse, pot up the tubers in dry soil and place in a suitable outbuilding or a garage.

Finally, I am sometimes asked where to buy young, rooted plants in the spring. I have been dealing with Halls of Heddon for over thirty years and have found the quality of their plants superb. Most importantly with dahlias, they supply virus-free plants. Their website is www.hallsofheddon.co.uk.

Ian Gillott

Seed Catalogue

Mr Fothergill seed catalogues are now available for you to order your 2021 seeds. Last year members received a 60% discount! This year is likely to be just as good.

As we are not having meetings I will deliver the catalogue to you and collect your order personally.

Please email me peter@radband.co.uk or text or ring me 07976640989.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Keep safe

Peter

Banksian Medal 2020

Normally, the Banksian medal is awarded as part of the Summer Show. This year, as we could not have a Summer Show, your committee decided that it should be awarded to a club member who has demonstrated great commitment to the club during the COVID-19 crisis.

After a short period of consideration (5 minutes), the committee all agreed that Stuart Slocombe should receive the medal. Stuart has managed to keep the trading hut open for most of the summer.

Many of us have been very grateful in having the opportunity to buy products for our gardens and I know Stuart has done some brisk trading. He was very unsure during the early days as members were asked to pay electronically if they could. Most did and were very prompt with their payments. This encouraged Stuart to continue his 'click and collect' service.

Well done and THANK YOU Stuart from all of us. We were not put off by the legs and white socks.



Tool Sharpening

We intend to have a tool sharpening session during the last opening day of the hut (1st November).

All the distancing rules will apply and strictly enforced by Stuart who has done a superb job managing the hut over the past couple of months.

Pricing will be the same as before; £2 per item so bring all your tools and have them sharpened and cleaned ready for the winter break.

December Meeting

We will be delivering a presentation over ZOOM in December. You will soon be receiving an email asking if you would be interested in a 'virtual' meeting. The email will explain everything and we will have trial runs throughout November for those who have never used ZOOM.



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).

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	Publicity: Julia Goodall 07814 747198	Ass Show Secretaries: Daryl & Katie Phillips