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Charlton & Blackheath
Amateur Horticultural Society
Founded 1950

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Hellebores and Bird's Eggs by Vanessa Bowman

Dear Gardener,

Last year I sent out a Christmas email to everyone. This year, I have invited some of our regular contributors to the monthly Newsletter to offer an additional item to tide you over our December break!

We approach the end of this year with a greater degree of optimism (hopefully) than we did the last and gardening has, of course, served us well in maintaining our spirits. Once again, I want to take this opportunity to thank you personally for your much appreciated and continued support as a member of CABAHS. The New Year will see us inviting you to share your thoughts on what we do well and what we can do to improve - so be prepared!

Pat sent in some stunning photos from a recent visit to Sheffield Park.

Famous for its stunning autumn colour, we had to book our visit to Sheffield Park in early November as it gets very busy. Sheffield Park is owned by the National Trust and is near East Grinstead in Sussex and is a landscape created over centuries with four lakes surrounded by a wonderful collection of trees and hidden glades. The 250 acres was originally designed in the 18th century with help from Capability Brown. Pulham Falls and the cricket pitch were added in the 19th century and the autumn colour by Arthur Soames in the 1920s and 30s.

The autumn colour comes from a collection of Nyssa and Acer trees among many others with brilliant displays of oranges, reds, purples and green all reflected in the lakes and it really is breathtaking. There's a huge giant Redwood with an enormous trunk which people flock to for photos. The colour of the trees is very weather dependent and this year meant that autumn came late because we have had so much rain, and the colour was all the better for it. The huge variety of native and non-native trees reach their peak at different times, so there's always something to see throughout the season.

There's a cafe and restaurant too and if the walks around the lakes aren't enough for you, it is all surrounded by acres of parkland which you can traverse if you like walking. There are plenty of benches for resting and admiring the views too. Spring here is wonderful too, with bluebells and a huge collection of rhododendrons and azaleas, so we try and go twice a year. I really recommend a visit.

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/sheffield-park-and-garden>



Lynda visited Maryon Park and reports:

Sparkle in the Park was held in Maryon Park, Charlton from 1-5 December. The event was free and unticketed. Last year's event was held in Avery Hill Park, Eltham, but had capped visitor numbers and finished early because of the lockdown. This year, as well as light displays, there were live performances, including school choirs, fairground rides for younger children, and market stalls, some selling food and drink. The parks trees in particular could be seen in a rather different perspective. Keep an eye out for this event next year!



Plant of the Month, from Anna:

Every one of us loves to be given cuttings, usually 2-5 inches in length. But the Yucca cuttings (gloriosa variegated) I received some 10 years ago from a neighbour were two feet tall. I did not know quite what to do with them, so I just stuck them in the ground. And they rooted. The specimen in the back garden is in shade during the winter months and doing well and the one in the front is in a sheltered position facing south. For the last few years it has been flowering in late autumn and winter, with tall stems supporting creamy, bell-shaped flowers protected by blush-pink sepals, beloved by bees, rising majestically above the foliage.

Architectural perennials such as Yucca, which are fully hardy, look good in exotic planting schemes, and in this instance, blend well with the purple Cordylines in the neighbouring garden. A versatile crop in some countries, with fibres used for weaving, and leaf bases, flowers and berries being edible. Roots are rendered down to remove toxins and used for various purposes and sap is used for skin ailments.

Yucca filamentosa (Adams Needle and Thread) and (Spanish Bayonet) is a very attractive grey-leaved specimen with cream flowers and, like Yucca gloriosa, is often planted as a focal point, such as in a corner or island bed to draw attention to the overall planting, often including Agapanthus. Smaller plants are often seen in containers for the same effect. So, if you have a large corner or deep planting bed (away from children) that lacks oomph, plant a Yucca.



Above left: Anna's Yucca



Above right: Yucca gloriosa variegata looking splendid, flowering in December, at Hall Place



Yucca gloriosa, with green-blue foliage, at Hall Place. This species was introduced to the U.K. around 1550 from the U.S.



Yucca filamentosa:

Unlike *Yucca gloriosa*, *Yucca filamentosa* is stemless and has stiff, upright dark green leaves. Certain varieties often display variegated foliage. Gigantic creamy-white flower spires appear in summer.

Kathy has gathered some Christmas jokes from you all:

I don't think our members will be challenging the Christmas Cracker professionals any time soon, but thank you to everyone who had a go!

What do you get if you cross a four-leafed clover with a nettle?

A rash of good luck 😊

Yet again someone has added more soil to my allotment

The plot thickens..

What is the most popular Christmas wine?

But I don't like brussels sprouts..



We also had some useful gardening definitions sent in:

"Half Hardy" is a variation on the phrase "Russian Roulette"

"Vigorous" is code for "has a Napoleonic compulsion to take over the world"

"A favourite of birds" means avoid planting near cars, paths and the washing line.

And some excellent philosophical statements:

"Grass is just a flower-bed in waiting"

"Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is knowing not to put it in the fruit salad."

Instead of topical tips, Pat writes:

You will hopefully all be busy doing other things this month and won't have time to do much in the garden apart from protecting some of your more precious plants and raiding the garden for things to add to a Christmas wreath such as ivy, holly, berries and seed heads. But don't forget the wildlife, the birds still need fresh water and maybe some food too, although listening to the pouring rain as I type that may not be in short supply! You can always look through your seed and plant catalogues and plan your garden for next year, which of course will look better than ever. Mine is still very green, but very untidy, but will do until after Christmas.

Charlton House Old Pond Garden & Volunteers

Like last year, the volunteers have had fun decorating the Long Border gates to give a Festive feel. The gates look so smart now the ivy has been taken off the adjacent wall. If you have time, try to fit in a walk there over the Christmas break.

All the best for a Happy Christmas and a much better year next year for all of us.

As we leave 2021 behind, I want to say a huge thank you to all of you, our members, who have supported us through this year.

I wish every one of you a lovely festive season and an excellent 2022 full of gardening possibilities!

Vija

