
The Notice Board

Number 60

Committee elections

Final reminder that the new Gardeners' Club committee will be elected at the xxx meeting. Please think about giving a little time to the Club and joining your fellow committee members to continue in developing what we do and how we do it. Any committee member will tell you what is involved, and you will need to fill in a nomination from which is available from Audrey Fox on the plant stall at our monthly meeting.



Spring is sooner recognized by plants than by men.

Chinese Proverb

Meeting report: February 2009

Mary Comer

Note: April's speaker will be, speaking on



We asked in the last issue if anyone had dealings with the "little gentleman in the black velvet waistcoat" that they would like to report for us.

Rosemary Naylor says she has tried, in tandem with a neighbour whose garden is similarly troubled, an electronic mole scarer. The moles are still happily in residence whilst the electronics whirr around them! She has also heard that old-fashioned mothballs (naphthalene) may work -has anyone tried them out? Ann Harroway has had advice from an expert-the mole catcher. She was advised on how to operate, and where to put, a mole trap, and it worked very quickly. Some good advice from a garden forum on mole traps goes as follows: leave the trap outside for a few days before using it and do not touch it with your hands or anything scented like new gloves or washed rags. Set the trap in a run BETWEEN two mole hills - carefully dig down until you expose the run. Place the trap so that it is in line with the run. Refit some turf back around the trap to block out the light. Check the traps every day, & if you have caught nothing within 3 days move the trap.

Tussles with a tamarisk

by Rosemary Naylor

What am I to do with a cantankerous tamarisk which is even more wily than I, reputedly, am?*

The plant in question came to me as a sad-looking shrub in a large plantpot. I was determined to give it a better life than it had had up to that time. It had been given to my late mother and had been left standing on her yard for some considerable time. She had been unable to plant it out and the wind had regularly blown it over until eventually it was left lying on its side. The poor plant continued to grow but by then did not know up from down. I took pity on it.

When it moved with me to Llanfair, eleven years ago, I promised it a better life and planted it centrally in my new red/pink/white border. From there I allowed it to take on whatever shape it desired, except that I constructed a wooden support structure around the base of the trunk to help it regain an upright stature.

Some years later it had still not resumed a heaven-ward direction of growth but having demolished the support structure I had so kindly afforded it was growing horizontally towards the path which fronted the border. It was now swiping me in the face each time I used the path. So I cut off one offending branch just as it tried to cross the path. That was a mistake for I now found a was being stabbed in the face whenever I walked that way.

My next move was to embark on a major redesign of the garden so that the paths would take me around the tamarisk without risking my getting a poke in the eye. I duly dug up the existing path adding more width to the border. I introduced good new soil, lots of bulbs, and completed the underplanting with lowgrowing rockery plants including snow-in-summer, arabis and so on. The Tamarix was by now established on a very strong trunk, as thick as my arm, but still growing horizontally just two feet above soil level, though seemingly healthy enough. However, its branches, instead of the normal horizontal growth one might expect, reach upwards and downwards, mainly in the latter direction.

But I had still not appeased said plant nearly enough. After a period of very strong winds last year I discovered that its downward growing branches had been sweeping backwards and forwards across the soil below clearing the ground quite bare. How ungrateful can a shrub be? Of the lowgrowing groundcover there was no sign, and I am wondering if the bulbs will dare to show their heads above ground level.

The Tamarix, when it comes into leaf, disguises some of its inner anguish. In May when it comes into flower it is a lovely haze of pink which is most attractive. My daughter-in-law when in France had three tamarisks, two of them showing a mound shaped habit but one a fine upright tree which when in flower was really camera-worthy.

Now I am coming to suspect that my specimen has decided to reproduce itself by layering its downward pointing branches into the soil it has so effectively cleared. In fact before I cut the offending branches short, one had already got its tip nestling into the soil. Should I accept a whole grove of them? Or should I take the wily old parent to feed Dr Ackermann's shredder? My patience is being tested to the limit. What should I do next?

*see ref to self in Notice Board No. 58

The March garden: tasks and ideas

Even the coldest, heaviest of clays should be beginning to warm up this month, unless we have a n especially wet and cold month. Whilst I do not suggest the old farmers' trick of sitting on your vegetable garden soil with a bare behind to test for soil warmth, it might be worth covering a portion of the beds with cloches, or even just garden fleece, to warm the soil up before planting begins in earnest. I have found that the cheapest cloches (usually fleece in metal hoops) are not worth buying as they only last a season if that. The mesh type is better, and can be rolled up and put away in the Winter if necessary. The longer, warmer days also make us want to get out and get on with sowing all the sorts of the seeds we have as soon as possible, but sowing too early unless you have a heated propagator or greenhouse may lead to leggy, pale seedlings which are

hard to raise. Better to sow later when seeds germinate faster and soon catch up with their early-sown brethren. Recent research suggests that pre-soaking or even chitting potatoes & sweet peas is not always necessary, although I must say that I still prefer to chit or pre-soak sweet pea seedlings, which I sow in the inner tubes of toilet rolls for less root disturbance when planting out.

When you start getting the garden into order, you may find that you have lost some plants on the borders of hardiness due to the very cold and wet Winter we have experienced; I think I have lost a cardoon in this way. Why not take the opportunity to buy something new from the Gardener's Club plant stall this month? And if you are splitting plants up, bring some along to the next meeting and share our efforts with your fellow gardeners.

Garden Portrait

Plant Profile: Primulas

The word *primula* Latin, meaning first (prime), and is applied to flowers that are among the first to appear in Spring.

Primula is a genus of 400–500 species of low-growing plants in the family Primulaceae. They include primrose, auricula, cowslip and oxlip. Many species are grown for their ornamental flowers, and they are native to the temperate Northern Hemisphere, south into tropical mountains in Ethiopia, Indonesia and New Guinea, and in temperate South America.

Perennial primulas bloom mostly during the spring, & their flowers can be purple, yellow, red, pink, or white. Generally, they prefer filtered sunlight and enjoy heavier soils which do not dry out.

Garden primroses are used as food plants by the caterpillars of some butterfly species, including the Duke of Burgundy, Setaceous Hebrew Character and Silver-ground Carpet moths. Our common primrose, *primula vulgaris*, flowers through the Winter in many gardens, and needs splitting up every 2 years to prevent overcrowding and loss of blooms. Many other garden primulas need the same treatment, although the daintier alpine varieties, such as *nana*, may not need splitting up so often.

Primula obconica is a good variety for those with very small gardens, as they are best grown on a windowsill where they do very well if kept moist but not wet. Some people are sensitive to the hairs on their leaves and stems, so be very careful when handling them.