

Gardening <<

# LEARN to GARDEN!



Some words of wisdom to avoid expensive mistakes from Cathie at The Gardening School, Squires at Secretts, Milford.

## *Sun and shade*

Last month we looked at the importance of your soil – knowing your type and its pH is fundamental before shopping for plants. I watched a lovely gardening show many years ago – Alan Titchmarsh sitting in his deckchair 'doing research' i.e. sitting there all day to map out the sunny and shady places! This isn't as silly as it sounds. Plants have distinct orientation requirements and there is no point in planting a sun-lover like roses in the shade or a daphne in the roaring hot south-facing sun. Some of you will already realise mistakes you have made.

## *Layout*

'Garden design' can be a scary term for novices. Look at what's already there and what you'd like. Small children need a safe area and lawn – no pond is preferable unless fenced off. A wildlife garden would need a pond and different habitats such as short grass, long grass, compost, woodpiles etc. If you enjoy entertaining al fresco, a large patio and barbecue. Don't forget the bins and washing line have to go somewhere. It can be fun taking a step back and looking at your garden in this way.

## *Plants*

Plants can be annuals, biennials or perennials depending on how long they live. Perennials can be woody or herbaceous and so it goes on. Plants have different temperature requirements, some are hardy and others need winter protection. It really is not that complicated, just systematic, and a little knowledge goes a long way.

## *The lawn*

Some people take grass care to the extreme and have the most amazing stripy, weed-free green lawn whereas others have a muddy weedy, moss-filled patch. Most of us are somewhere in between! Lawns need nurturing, mowing, aerating, scarifying, feeding, weeding and top dressing as well as seeding regularly to look good. Don't worry if they look brown in summer – they bounce back.

## *Fruit, veg and herbs*

Everyone can grow something, however big their garden is, even in a pot (several articles on my website). Potatoes in pots are a favourite, as are raised beds and having fresh

produce untainted with chemicals and as fresh as can be is one of the greatest pleasures in gardening

## *Weeds, pests and diseases*

Why do things die? Which plants are weeds? My students have been creating herbarium specimens of pressed plants at every stage of their life cycle. To know what is afflicting a plant is also important, as is identifying beneficial beasts. I challenge every one of you to find a ladybird larvae which eats many times its body weight in aphids every day! Also try to find a friendly way of controlling the problems without chemical sprays.

## *Pruning and propagation*

Plants such as bush roses and buddleja flower on the current season's growth but others such as rambling roses and philadelphus flower on two-year-old growth. Wisteria may take years to flower and so much damage can be done by incorrect pruning or (worse) not pruning. There are regular seasonal workshops at The Gardening School. Plants can be grown from seed, divided into more plants and propagated by soft, semi-ripe and hardwood cuttings. One of the easiest and rewarding is to place a willow or cornus stick in the ground in the winter and it will grow into a new plant the following year!

## *Want to learn more?*

This article forms the basis of the 10-week introductory course 'Learn to Garden' starting on Wednesday, 22nd April. There is also a 10-week RHS module on soils, nutrition and the root environment, described as 'the best one to start with' by every student who has attended the RHS! This starts on Friday 24th April so why not come along?

All courses are run from Cathie's Gardening School based in Squire's Garden Centre at Secretts, Milford. Workshops in April include 'Organic Gardening', 'Grow your own fruit and veg'. Home consultancy visits and workshops are available to give as gifts to be selected by the recipient and are valid for a year.

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