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 Snowdrops at  
Wroxton Abbey, February  
2019 Photo: A. Brooks

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February  
2021  
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## WELCOME TO 2021'S FIRST NEWSLETTER

February is a (some would say, 'blessedly') short month. The stars of the garden are the snowdrops which, sure as eggs is eggs, are making their way up, regardless of the difficulties we are currently facing; it is month for enjoying the little things and looking forward to a kind and gentle spring ~ Ann

~ ideas ~ news ~ advice ~ links ~ information ~

# Sneak Peek



Elaine and Barry Taylor's garden in Banbury. "We have 12 containers in our back garden just for Agapanthus, and then a further 73 containers dotted around, plus window boxes and a hay rack. Our favourite place to buy new pots is Whichford Pottery".

[Photo: E. Taylor]

*~ a message from Cropredy ~*

I recently came across a little book of poems which belonged to my mother, *writes Eraine*.

## **FEBRUARY**

**The second month is dull and wet  
We want to stay indoors and yet  
Outside beneath the cold grey skies  
The first lambs make their bleating cries.  
It really is a joy to see  
Them skip about so happily;  
Then snowdrop pure and crocus gay  
Tell us that Spring is on the way.**

We have some snowdrops and hellebores in flower, a welcome sight after our snow. Do hope everyone is well, please pass on our kind regards. Keep safe and well.

Kind regards, Eraine and Andries



## BUYING PLANTS ONLINE

~ BY JULIE TOMLIN

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In 2007 we found ourselves with a back garden that was devoid of plants - the result of installing ground energy.

The need for deep trenches for the ground loop in a garden that was relatively compact meant that we reduced our back garden to something more reminiscent of the battlefields of Normandy... Why do we have torrential rainfall when trenches have to be dug??



Afterwards only rough grass colonised the slowly settling ground, and plants had to wait. And wait. It took 10 years for the ground to finally settle...



A garden slightly small for ground energy was actually rather large when it came to buying plants. My long-planned plant list - with relatively large numbers of an edited list of varieties - was going to be prohibitively expensive to buy. So, armed with my trusty RHS Plant finder, and Google, I started searching.

Then (and even more so now in lockdown) plants from some of the major sources both online and in garden centres, were expensive.

So how can we buy good quality plants we like, without spending a fortune?

I find that the first places to try are the specialists. A number of nurseries specialise in a few genus and their stock is, in my experience, great quality, home grown and much cheaper than that of the plant consolidators and garden centres. Some offer cheap or even free postage. Best of all, many are run by those completely devoted to their product and very generous with their advice. I love a character and thankfully, the gardening world is full of them.

Some of you may remember Gerald Sinclair at the Nursery Further Afield at Mixbury - he adored Hemerocallis and visiting his nursery at flowering time is an experience I have never forgotten. The daylily beds were spectacular! His enthusiasm was infectious. I was a relative novice and he was thrilled to share his knowledge. I bought plants at £3.50 each and came away with knowledge that was priceless. Since then, I have loved a specialist nursery and the people that make them special.

The specialist nursery will have a true version of the variety you want to buy.

If they don't have enough plants in a variety I need (or are out of stock) I ring them. The stockholding online is often wrong (they are better growers than administrators) and more plants are sometimes available. Or they will tell you when they will be available.

Recently I was trying to track down a pale blue Iris sibirica – 'Perry's Blue'. Google it and look at the images - you will see a sea of different blue irises all purporting to be 'Perry's Blue'. I rang Specialist Irises of Sissinghurst. They were out of stock of the "size they like to sell" - a large division - but had 3 plants that were under size. I could have them for just the cost of the postage... I had never bought from them before but will now.

The iris was for a trial bed for a pictorial meadow planned for our front garden. Its rather difficult location necessitated a trial - sheltered by the glorious oak tree opposite but also shaded by it and the adjacent limes, when all are in leaf. But baked in full sun when the trees are leafless. The soil has only previously grown rough grass, it is orange with unimproved clay and has bedrock only a few inches below the surface. If I was a plant, I would refuse to grow there...

However, the summer saw the trial bed full of flower - *Leucanthemum* apparently loves it as does the "new" pale blue sage, *Salvia nemerosa* 'Crystal Blue'. Less lofty than its cousin 'Caradonna' (which I also love) and a delicate clear pale blue, the salvias have thrived, flowering through to November and are still throwing up the odd flower now (mid-winter). We wait to see how it survives the winter but so far it is looking good. Its newness means that it has been offered at the garden centres at ridiculously high prices. But the specialist salvia nursery that supplied my plants (with free postage) made it affordable. Middleton Nurseries are up in Staffordshire, so I figure that if salvias are hardy for them, they might be for me. (I buy from a nursery north of here if what I am buying is borderline hardy.) Middleton also offer discounts to their loyal customers... A great find.

If you are buying many types of plants these specialists might not work for you. I buy 5 or 7 plants of a variety, or even more, to plant bold swathes or give cohesive repetition across the garden. However, if I am trialling varieties in smaller numbers, or infilling existing planting, Beth Chatto, Claire Austin and Woottens are all worth a look. They specialise in a few plants, but their overall ranges are huge, the wealth of information immense. Woottens also sells the *Plantsman's Handbook* - an amusing, opinionated, erudite publication, with detailed information on a host of plants, written by Michael Loftus who returned "home" to Suffolk and started Woottens nursery after a successful time in London making Neal's Yard a household name. The handbook is well worth a few hours of your life...

If buying for shade, Long Acre Plants is a great find. This Somerset nursery specialises in shade loving plants and their website is informative. All the plants bought from here have thrived.

Our garden has lots of grasses - they provide height and structure in the absence of the large shrubs and trees that would potentially damage our ground loop. When I started designing the garden Piet Oudolf was a relatively new name in the UK and grasses were not readily available in the garden centres. Neil Lucas at Knoll Gardens was the source of all information and offered the best range of grasses and sedges. He still does. Yet his grasses (and perennials) are usually better priced than those at the garden centre and his varieties are correctly named. I sometimes disagree with his descriptions (his "gently creeping" *Carex* was more "intent on world domination" even in my awful soil) but he remains the best grass specialist.



Stipa pseudoichu with Echinacea 'White Swan'

Be aware though that whilst many plants are successfully established from a 9cm pot, not all true grasses are. Many grasses hate being divided and sulk for at least year afterwards. A small division or a small plant may die so I try to buy true grasses in at least a 1 litre pot, to help them establish and survive. I accept that they will sulk. But buying bigger plants means that postage rates are an important consideration.



We are lucky to have some good plant centres around us - Hillier, Farnborough, Barn Farm Plants and the National Herb Centre offer a good range year-round and great service. It is important to support our local businesses. But I couldn't always find what I wanted, in quantity, at a price I wanted to pay. If you want to plant asters in April for example you won't find them in a garden centre. Online plant buying has proved a good alternative and whilst I have had the occasional bad experience, buying from online specialists has enabled me to find a wide range of plants and given me access to a wealth of knowledge from some really committed growers. There are some excellent small nurseries out there grateful for your business and deserving of it. Perhaps worth giving them a try?



Sources:

Beth Chatto - <https://www.bethchatto.co.uk/>

Claire Austin Hardy Plants - <https://claireaustin-hardyplants.co.uk/>

Irises of Sissinghurst - <https://irisofsissinghurst.com/>

Knoll Gardens - <https://www.knollgardens.co.uk/> Subscriber discounts

Long Acre Plants - <https://www.plantsforshade.co.uk/>

Middleton Nurseries - <https://middletonnurseries.co.uk/> Free delivery over £35 at the moment and returning customer discounts

Woottens of Wenhaston - <https://www.woottensplants.com/>

[Photos: J Tomlin]

**Have you visited a garden you would like to share with the BGC group? Please send text and photos to [annbrooks100@gmail.com](mailto:annbrooks100@gmail.com)**

“ What good is the warmth of summer, without the cold of winter to give it sweetness”.

~ John Steinbeck



## **My favourite ..... by David Williams**

1. **Garden I have visited within 40 miles of Great Bourton:** Kiftsgate. I loved the variety of formality and wilderness.
2. **Gardening TV programme:** Gardeners' World
3. **Gardening radio programme:** I sometimes listen to Gardeners' Question Time.
4. **Vegetable or fruit I grew in my garden:** A thornless Blackberry, variety not known but reliably has produced huge, sweet berries for some 12- 15 years.
5. **Gardening task:** Strangely, dead heading. It can be tedious, but its immediate tidying effect is very satisfying.
6. **Place to buy plants locally:** Farnborough Nursery. They provide a wide range of excellent quality plants and offer exceptionally good service.
7. **Plant in my garden:** A Pieris in a large barrel. It is always of interest; apart from its elegant form, it produces red bracts, white flowers and red new growth throughout the year.
8. **Season of the gardening year:** Late spring when, due to a neighbour's overhanging Leylandii, the heavily shaded acid bed produces delicate Erythronium (dog's tooth violet) and rare double Sanguinaria (bloodroot) flowers which herald the start of warmer weather.
9. **Garden I have ever visited:** The Lost Gardens of Heligan in Cornwall. I particularly like the wilderness around the water features.



## VIRTUAL GARDEN TOURS ONLINE

In the depths of winter, especially this one, who could say no to a visit to a garden, with no issues of social distancing or even an entrance fee?

Welcome to the world of online visual tours.

Here are some links to ones I think you might like, but there are thousands available if you want to go exploring.

Firstly, here is a link to a website called “The Spaces” and [its 9 garden tours](#) to Versailles, Monet’s garden in Giverny plus gardens in Italy, Brazil and the US.

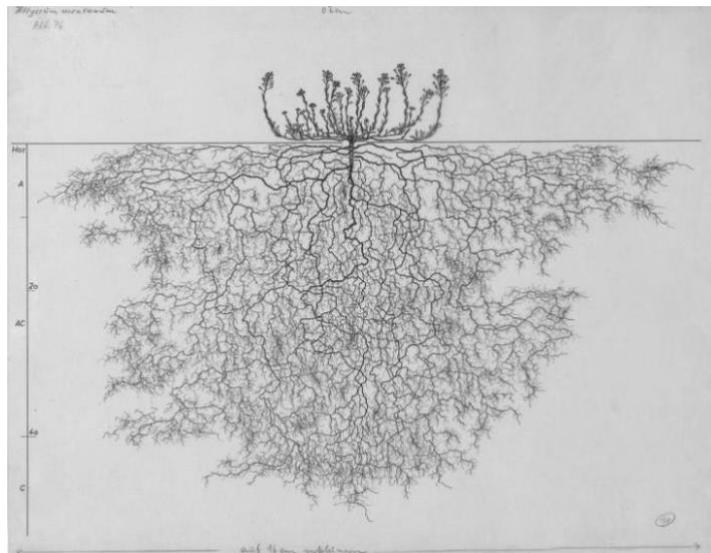
Next up is *Gardens Illustrated*’s best [12 virtual garden tours](#).

The Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew has its own [YouTube channel](#) (you will need to have the YouTube app on your device) which has plenty of tours of both Kew and Wakehurst, but also Science Stories, How-to pieces and Plant profiles.

The magazine *The English Garden* also has its [top picks](#) of gardens, including West Dean and Mapperton, two gardens I would love to visit.

If you can still fit more into your schedule, as you would expect Wisley and the other RHS gardens have lots of tours [here](#) and the NGS has a [wide range of virtual tours](#) grouped under enticing titles like Cotswold Gardens, Smaller and Suburban Gardens, and Designer’s Gardens.

One more interesting website I recently stumbled across is a [series of drawings of root systems](#), courtesy of Wageningen University in the Netherlands. I found them strangely diverting.



*Alyssum montanum*

## DID YOU KNOW? The Daisy

The word daisy is a contraction of 'day's eye' from the old English *dæges eage*, so called because the petals of some of the species open at dawn and close at dusk. For the same reason, in Medieval Latin, a common term for daisy was *solis oculus*, meaning 'sun's eye' .

My favourite within the family is *Erigeron karvinskianus*, shown here on the steps of the beautiful Chivel Farm garden we visited last year. It self-seeds around the garden, so once you have it, it pops up here and there, adding cheer and happiness.



[Photo: A. Brooks]



## CONSIDER THE MOON

~ by Michele Tyler

“

As the planting season will soon be upon us, perhaps now, while we have some extra time during this lockdown, it is a good moment to consider when to sow your seeds or plant up your seedlings.

You will have heard the Old Wives' tale about doing your planting at the time of the waxing moon when the moon's illumination is growing, but is there any down-to-earth evidence for this? Science has now proven that the phases of the moon affect the earth's magnetic field which in turn give us the sea tides. But how does that affect our plants?

Research has found that the same pull of the moon affects all water - even the tiniest drop has a micro-tide. Of course, a large proportion of plants is composed of water so it makes sense that plants would have more energy to grow as the moon 'grows' in our sky. Our atmosphere is also affected and so it is more likely to give us some soaking rain immediately after a full or new moon - exactly what we want when our plants have just gone into the ground! The additional light coming from a waxing to full moon also encourages leaf growth, while the waning moon encourages root growth.

The moon is waxing when we can see any part of its right half lit up and it is waning when no portion of the moon's right half is visible, or we can see the left side lit. Dates for the new moon this year are:

13 January, 11 February, 13 March, 12 April, 11 May, 10 June, 10 July, 8 August, 7 September, 6 October, 4 November and 4 December.

The moon is waxing for two weeks after these dates until the full moon so using this theory, these are the best times to do your planting.

While looking for the new moon dates, I also found the information below in which might also be of interest. The 'super full moons' occur when the moon is nearest in its orbit to the earth so this must also help our plants to grow - lucky then that the two this year are in the spring!

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## SPECIAL MOON EVENTS IN 2021

- Super Full Moon: 27<sup>th</sup> April
- Micro New Moon: 11 May
- Super Full Moon: 26 May
- Blue Moon: 22 Aug (third Full Moon in a season with four Full Moons)
- Super New Moon: 4 Nov
- Partial Lunar Eclipse visible in London on 19 Nov
- Micro Full Moon: 19 Nov
- Super New Moon: 4 Dec
- Micro Full Moon: 19 Dec
- No Black Moon in London in 2021 (third New Moon in a season with four New Moons)



 **And finally**

## **Some advice on photography in the garden by Barry Taylor**

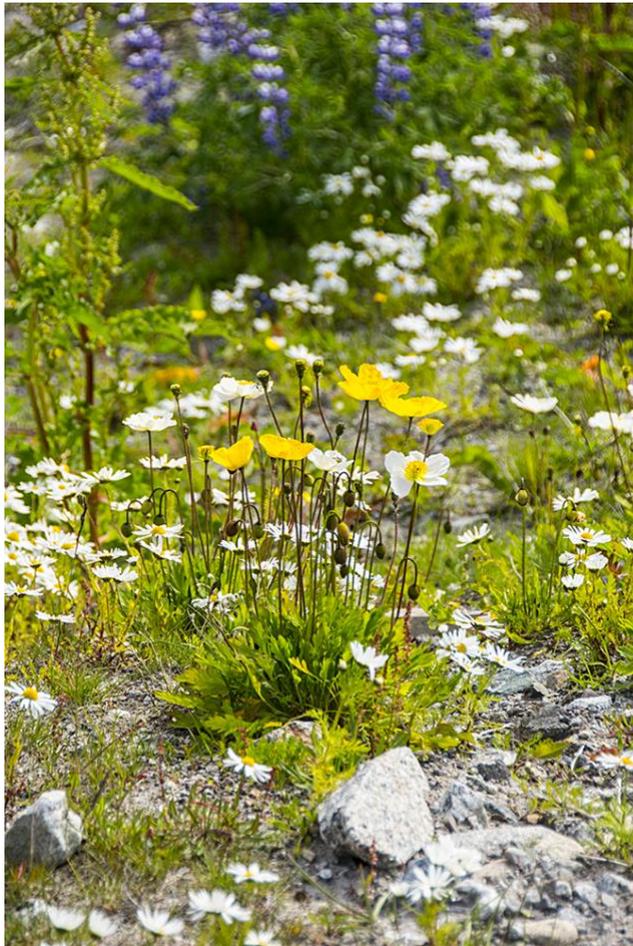
I enjoy taking photographs of all gardens. All I do is see what I like, line the camera up and take the shot. There are many gardens that I love, but one of the best is RHS Harlow Carr just outside Harrogate; this shot of the tulips was taken there.



If you are taking your camera on a garden visit, it can be useful to take the instruction manual! Also pack a spare battery, and a polyethylene bag - not to put cuttings in, but to put one knee on for low down shots. The first rule is getting up early, have breakfast and park up to be the first in. The advantage of this is you don't see other people for a while, then it's only a few, and at about 10am they all come in, some to have breakfast! They are the ones with the clean wellies! If people are in the way, I wait until they have gone, or I come back later. A lot of professional photographs are taken after the visitors have gone home or early before you get there: this is because the light is softer. If you have a tripod that will help too.

Here are some pictures I took in Greenland:







THANKS AGAIN TO ALL OUR CONTRIBUTORS. DON'T FORGET THAT WE ARE HOPING TO VISIT ADMINGTON HALL (below) ON JUNE 2<sup>ND</sup>.

