

The Gold Club

November 2017



CASTLE | BRIMSMORE | POUNDBURY

Dates for your diary

Free Talks Spring 2018

Free Talks 2.30pm

**Tuesdays at Brimsmore
Gardens**

Wednesdays at Poundbury Gardens

Thursdays at Castle Gardens

Jan 23/24/25 - Hedges and Barriers

Jan/Feb 30/31/01 - Container Gardening

Feb 06/07/08 - Seed Sowing and
Potting On

Feb 13/14/15 - A Year on the Veg Plot

Feb 20/21/22 – Propagation

Feb/Mar 27/28/01 – Pruning Shrubs
and Roses

Hot off the press!

The final results of the Garden Centre Association's annual Christmas Competition have been announced and Castle Gardens and Brimsmore Gardens have both scooped top national awards in the Garden Centre category, with Castle taking the top award and Brimsmore coming third in the country up against garden centres across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, this is the eighth time that Castle Gardens has received the coveted national accolade for its Christmas displays.

Winter Glow

A note from Nicky

As I'm writing this, it is distinctly chilly outside today....I have many clothing layers on as I do feel the cold and am currently assessing how many more I can put on without losing the ability to walk! However, it is November and the cold weather is what we expect ...and we can't complain. We have had some lovely bright days to date!

Anyhow, our hardiness won't stop us from doing those garden jobs such as sowing our sweet peas for next year, planting the last of our bulbs, pruning and tidying up our perennials, shrubs and trees, planting roses and/or trees and mulching our beds with composted bark or something similar. Now I have exhausted you with all those jobs let's move onto lovelier, more relaxing topics such as Christmas!

Our displays in Poundbury, Brimsmore and Castle are all up and running, and feedback so far is 'the best

ever!' So if you haven't seen the displays yet, its really worth making a trip with your friends and family. Myself and my peers all have a 'favourite room' ...I wonder what yours will be? Judging across the centres took place last week so fingers crossed we perform well again this year....if not for us

but certainly for Louise, who comes up with the ideas and meticulously puts it all together.



Now that the displays are up, our focus turns to organising making space for all the Christmas plants due in. Indoor favourites such as Poinsettias, Princettias, Amaryllis, Azaleas and Christmas Cacti together with outdoor potted Christmas Trees are all in. Planted up arrangements for indoor and outdoor, fresh cut Christmas Trees are due 24th November and then all the Christmas trimmings such as wreaths and mistletoe from the 1st week of December. What a wonderful time of year it is to

have all these lovely plants available. Anyhow enough of this sentiment.....time to crack on. At least, all this activity getting the Garden centres ready will keep out the cold and keep us warm and glowing for the next few weeks!



Newsflash!

An event coming up.....

Free Festive Event

Light up a life with
Weldmar Hospicecare Trust
at **Castle Gardens**

Wednesday 29 November
6.30pm

A time of celebration and reflection,
remembering the life and love of those dear to us.
Everyone is welcome to dedicate a light in their
memory on our tree

Late night Christmas shopping

We will be open at Castle Gardens,
Brimsmore Gardens & Poundbury
Gardens until **7.00pm** from

11 - 15 December

Come along and enjoy our wonderland
of lights, baubles and all things sparkly.

Our restaurants will be open for light
refreshments.

Events at Brimsmore Gardens and Poundbury Gardens

Story Time—Every Friday in December until Christmas at 4pm

Joins us for a festive story and free hot chocolate

Deadline for letters for Father Christmas

Sunday 3 December

Brimsmore's Festive Treasure Hunt

Thursday 12 October—Sunday 24 December

Help Father Christmas find everything he needs for his journey at the garden centre for a chance to win a family ticket for the Octagon pantomime. Prizes for everyone who completes it!

Julias House Craft Day

Tuesday 13 February
Castle Gardens
10.30am—3.30pm

Circus Workshop

by Gosmina Circus

Wednesday 14th February 1.30pm - 4.30pm

Friday 16th February 1.30pm—4.30pm

Come and learn some Circus!! Play games and have fun... Juggling, Spinning Plates, Diabolos and more!

The Gardener's Stock Pot

The Gardener's Stockpot

by Victoria McManus, Hardy Plant Team Member at Castle Gardens

The vegetable garden I have been renovating in Wincanton is surprisingly still productive, even in November. We're harvesting spinach, celery and chard, as well as mountains of kale, and in the greenhouse the family are still picking tomatoes, peppers, chillis and herbs.

The three huge grapevines yielded masses of both red and white grapes, which one of my fellow gardeners has taken off to make into wine in his shed – and I was reminded about how much room one needs in order to make good use of everything a garden provides.

I recently bought a dehydrator, which is a fantastic way of drying herbs efficiently while keeping their lovely fresh colours. Rose petals and geranium leaves have been dried for pot pourri, and we have managed to produce some rather wrinkly looking but very tasty dried apple slices.

Other apples have gone into buckets to make cider vinegar; and I am using last year's vinegar to make chutney with all the hard pears and a glut of walnuts from my mother's garden. (We are also experimenting with walnut-flavoured vodka for Christmas!)

I am very fortunate to have a garage that I have kitted out with old kitchen cupboards and benches to store all the food we preserve, as well as the honey from the bees. In times past, every home would have had a larder and cool storage areas for hanging game, keeping cheeses and curing hams. Their store rooms would have been rat proof and lined with sturdy shelves to take jars of pickled veg, jams and crocks of salted bacon.

Modern houses are designed without any space for this; even in older properties many cellars may have been turned into play rooms, larders converted into downstairs loos and every available nook and cranny has had a 'makeover'.

Since the Second World War (and because of it) gardening success has been measured by the yield and size of our veg, and indeed this is criteria often applied to judging produce shows. But at the same time our modern lifestyle has reduced the need to store food over the winter.

So how do we avoid waste? Leaving surplus fruit in boxes for neighbours to take is always appreciated. Better forward planning in the garden, perhaps? Sometimes it is beyond our control, but next season the vegetable plot at Wincanton is to be redesigned, so as to produce only what's needed for a busy family. More potatoes, leeks and onions – and a bit less kale! We are also going to experiment with growing squash on the compost heap. This will free up space needed for a new cut flower bed for next year, after being hugely inspired by Sarah Raven's very informative talk on cut flowers at Brimsmore Garden Centre last month.

Another answer could be to rethink our gardening customs and grow for flavour, rather than yield. Botanist and TV gardener James Wong is a great advocate: he chooses old varieties that taste better, is very keen on perennial vegetables such as skirret – and rather shockingly nips out his tomato plants after they have produced their first truss!



We have a whole selection of James Wong's vegetable seeds here at Castle Gardens, so why not try growing something new next year?

Victoria

Don't forget - more gardening advice on our website www.TheGardenerOnline.co.uk

Tales from the Potting Shed

One of my indicators as to where we are in the year is whether Malcolm and Dale are still in shorts and they both are so it's certainly not yet winter. But the Autumn is moving on with the days getting shorter and generally its wetter and windier but still very warm and humid. The autumn colours were good this year especially at the start of Autumn but the back end of two hurricanes have made a mess and most deciduous foliage is falling quite rapidly.

At the time of writing we've just finished the three Christmas launches. This means a huge amount of hard work from the team and particularly Louise who has to be on duty every day with some late nights too for nearly 4 weeks! Usually she wakes up on the morning after they've all been finished slightly uncertain about the effect produced, despite the positive feedback from everyone else but this year she was pleased with the results! There's more to do and you'll see over the weeks the displays getting fuller and smaller themes being added in the build up to December.

We must get the displays finished in a very tight time scale because we just don't have the space to be able to carry it out at a leisurely pace. Inevitable also, whatever time is given, it gets filled and so a tight deadline sharpens the mind somewhat. It's really important to remember that it takes support from the whole team for the displays to be built not just those who are doing the display work. Some staff are left running the centre, others finish their "day job" and then come in to help, the delivery teams have to be more self-sufficient and then if they've time, they'll come in to help clear boxes....and then there are the friends and family who turn up to give a boost some evenings and at the weekend. So, a huge team effort.

At Autumn half term, we get a sudden avalanche of families in and this makes everything busier, especially in the restaurants, as big parties of parents and children pour in after looking at the Christmas displays. This can put pressure on facilities and this wasn't helped by a little darling leaving a tap on full blast with the plug left in the sink in the gents! This caused a wonderful water feature out of the door and down the corridor. I was working away at my desk when I got a call and apparently, it's in the small print of my job description to sort such things out! I didn't mind because whatever I was working on was pretty tedious and it gave me a break.

The small print also needed checking the other Sunday when I was off duty. I came into the centre at Castle Gardens late in the afternoon just as we were closing and was asked if I'd have a look at a drain that had just started overflowing in the car park. It was the main foul drain and several hours later I managed to unblock it. The culprit was a T-shirt which had been flushed down the toilet. The following day I was invited to attend a "Leaders for Change" lunch at the garden centre industry's major trade show at the NEC in Birmingham. As I looked around the room I wondered who else had had the same experience the day before!

The trade show was very useful and there was lots to see. I met James Wong there and he remembered coming to speak in Sherborne at the Literary Festival a few years ago. We were on a Gardener's Question time panel in the evening of the Literary Festival and I was asked to give James a lift to the station. His train was 45 minutes late so we had a good chance to talk. He is an inspirational gardener and so I always try a few of his suggestions each year. This year it was Cape Gooseberries as part of a campaign to encourage children into gardening and they have been superb.

As part of the Yeovil Literary Festival we hosted Sarah Raven at Brimsmore last week. She was an excellent speaker and rather than tell us all about her life as most gardening celebrities tend to (and to be fair are asked to) she talked about practical techniques she uses in her cutting garden. This was really useful and there was lots of information in the presentation.

We need some suggestions for speakers for next year's Gold Club Summer Party and so she has gone onto the list. Your ideas are most welcome.

We are planning to host our open-air theatre friends Illyria again in 2018. They are planning 5 performances; The Adventures of Dr Dolittle, The Pirates of Penzance, The Merchant of Venice, The War of the Worlds and The Hound of The Baskervilles. That, I think, is something for everyone! As soon as we have dates I'll let you know.

Poundbury was featured heavily in a Channel 4 series "Electric Dream" by Phillip K Dick which starred Timothy Spall. Mostly it was the Buttermarket Square which was used and it looked very empty as cars were kept out at the time of shooting. It also took place before we carried out the building and planting of some raised beds which has softened and brightened up the whole square. Time flies doesn't it? It was a year ago now at the time of writing that The Queen unveiled the statue of The Queen Mother outside The Engine Room restaurant at Poundbury. Ho hum!

Mike