

Keeping in Touch, May 22nd 2020

Hello again,

I'm sure it didn't escape your notice but it rained overnight. Thank goodness.

Today we've got another lovely set of photos from members' gardens and, controversially for a HARDY plant society newsletter, some cacti.

PLANT LABELS

Judy Reid says she uses a chinograph pencil on her labels and cleans with a spot of Jif

ADVICE REQUIRED

Here's a challenge for you all, this request is from me. I have a sloped area to one side of my drive. It gets sun all day long for 6 months of the year, and none at all from mid October to mid February. As we are part way down a hill, the site is always pretty damp from rain run off coming down from Bradfield. Even before last night's rain it was still damp from the winter. The soil is acidic, clayish, and has previously had a few trees on it, which were taken down before we arrived, though the large stumps are still there and sprouting a bit. I think the trees were self seeded as they butt up against a dry stone wall. But they've obviously been there a long time.

So what can I plant there? I want a mixed border of shrubs and perennials if possible and am willing to try things to see if they survive, but I think I need thugs as it's 80 sq. m. Anyone got any suggestions? This year I'm putting some annuals in. Around me gardens have lots of roses, rhododendrons, azaleas, so I assume they'll be okay. As it's not my main garden area, I want to keep it cheap! Thanks in advance of what I know will be great suggestions.

PHOTOS FROM YOUR GARDENS

Frank Abel has taken time out from cycling round Norfolk Park to take some lovely pics of current highlights in his garden. In order of appearance; *Cornus controversa* in his courtyard opposite the kitchen door, 'a Rheum enjoying its moment of glory in the company of an olive' and finally 'a mature lime in my front revelling in its new clothes.' The rose in the front is *Rosa 'Zephirine Drouhin'* which according to David Austin's website is 'Wonderfully scented, deep rose pink blooms. Flowers freely and almost continuously'.





Barbara Dygnas sent in *Tulipa sprengeri*, still flowering well despite the drought.



She also offers *Heuchera 'Brown Finch'*. She says 'This was a HPS conservation plant from 2010 to 2015. It now has over 4 listings in the RHS Plantfinder. I find the name off-putting. Ian Greenwood had to convince me it was a good plant. It is. Thank you Ian.'



I've never got on with heuchera. But then I often don't take to things that are universally loved including tomato ketchup and custard creams – its probably only a matter of time before someone starts selling Heuchera 'Tomato Ketchup' and Heuchera 'Custard Cream'.

Rob Spencer is celebrating his Alliums (Violet Beauty?)



And Judy Reid her *Lathyrus aureus*. She says 'We first saw this plant at Bourton House in the Cotswolds some years ago and we obtained it from an NGS garden in Repton, the owner kindly giving us a piece of hers. It seems pest free & increases each year. It does not seem to seed itself but we have managed to germinate a few plants & the ones we have planted are doing well.'



Paula Thomas flies the flag for aquilegias. She says 'Aquilegias are plants I particularly like. You start off with a named variety and next thing you know the children arrive and combine aspects of several of your named varieties. My aquilegias started off in the border but really want to live in the gravel driveway – and I let them have some space there as it's impossible to transplant the bigger plants without breaking the roots. Somebody occasionally runs over a few, but we don't normally have anyone who wipes out the entire colony for a flowering season. Attached are a photo of part of the colony, plus a close-up of a particularly pretty blue and white double.'





You are lucky Paula, these look great. I grew aquilegias for years, but ended up with nothing but what I can only describe as 'mucky pink'. Do you remember playing with plasticine as a child, at first you had lots of lovely colours, after a couple of days it was a ball of brown stuff. That's my experience of aquilegias, after a few years, they end up mucky pink!

I'm celebrating my cacti. The first two *Rebutia alata* and an easter cactus (*Rhipsalidopsis* something or other) have flowered profusely this year. The *Rebutia* was bought at a Cactus Society show about 8 years ago in Birmingham Botanical Gardens, the *Rhipsalidopsis* was from Netto about 10 years ago. The third does flower but in late winter, no idea what it is but I bought it as one little 'thumb' of spines a long, long, long time ago. I should repot it, but last time I did, despite wearing gloves, I had to spend half an hour removing the spiny hairs from my fingers with tweezers. So, it can stay where it is and I'll just feed it regularly during the watering season.

My interest in cacti and succulents was sparked about 20 years ago when living next door to our member John Macmillan. John had a large cactus collection in a 6 x 8 greenhouse. If I fed his cat when he was away I

was always given strict instructions not to water anything in the greenhouse, which I didn't. But I always took a sneaky peak at all the plants.





Don't forget to send your garden pics to tonifrascina@outlook.com

Bye for now

Toni