

# Stratford sub Castle Garden Club March 2021

## Get the Rhythm !

When we got married we bought a new house – a semi-detached, in Hinckley, Leicestershire and like most new houses, the garden was covered in various weeds and not a lot else. My Dad said 'Chick, (that is me by the way) you need some rhubarb'. He dug some up out of his garden and we have it still. Incidentally, after Hinckley, it has lived in Kirmington, South Humberside, Oswaldtwistle, Lancashire, Clayton Le Dale, Lancashire and now Stratford sub Castle. Last year some visitors thought I was growing huge Gunnera so that you can see that it is doing well. I do give it the VIP treatment with lots of homemade compost and regular watering and it is in shade for about half of the day. Those rhubarb crowns were the start of 53 years of gardening and I have enjoyed every bit of it. I have always planted what I wanted and experimented as I pleased. If an idea failed then, no matter, it is my garden.

I have learned such a lot by experimenting and twice, now, have discovered that something that I am doing, because it seemed a good idea, and I liked the effect, **is an official 'something' in garden design.**



I am an 'all year round' gardener so my garden has to look good in winter and I am constantly looking at it through the windows if I am not outside. To achieve interest I have lots of evergreen shrubs of all colours. Bright yellow slow growing conifers, grey leaved shrubs, variegated shrubs that are yellow and green or cream and green all add to the mix. Why wouldn't you have these amazing plants with antifreeze in their colourful leaves? Trees, old and new, and their bark all clothe the garden. I have always planted a garden for winter,

first, even though it was a steep learning curve when I moved from acid Lancashire clay to Stratford sub Castle chalk. (Image *Calocedrus decurrens* 'Berrima Gold')



When Garden Designers talk about '**Structure**' I thought that they meant walls, pergolas, fences and patios. You would, wouldn't you? Well, they do mean that but they also mean plants that are clothed with leaves in winter and give a pattern in your garden. Useful evergreen shrubs for this job are varieties of pittosporum, euonymus, hebe, euphorbia, phormium, senecio, ilex, ceanothus and choisya and of course, conifers. Topiary 'box' fits into this category as well. I have some topiary but use it informally as I have an informal garden that wraps itself around you. These plants, along with any trees, create a framework that gives shapes, colour and texture all year round. **Flowers and vegetables come and go but shrubs and trees remain so that you have a STRUCTURE and don't have a 'flatscape' in winter.** (Image *Euonymus* 'White Spire')

Another thing I learned, by chance, happened because I so enjoy phlox. I brought a few varieties with me from Lancashire and as they have spread I have divided them and put them in various parts of the garden. The effect was so good – a great heap of flowers of the same colour in every direction. This seemed such a good idea so I have done the same again with Rudbeckia 'Goldsturm'. These are bright yellow and flower in September, long after the phlox in July. **I have recently discovered that garden designers call this effect created by repeated planting of the same variety, RHYTHM, and the effect unifies your garden.** (Actually, repeating the same bit of tune or rhythm in music unifies a piece.) This coming summer I shall try this with some other varieties of plants including Achillea 'Cloth of Gold', Canna 'Wyoming' and probably the grass

Panicum 'North Wind'. The last two are very tall and upright to give some uplifting spires amongst the low and mid-level planting. If you are reorganising your garden this coming Spring make sure you have STRUCTURE and you get the RHYTHM.



*Ilex* 'Golden King'



Senecio

You can see that I need a long sunny spring and a cool summer with rain about once a week (at night) to keep all this new planting doing well. I expect that you would like something similar too. I look forward to a cup of tea and a chat with you in the garden before too long.

Dorothy Richards