

Stratford sub Castle Garden Club May 2021

I seem to have heard it more often, just lately, a rather resigned voice saying
"ARE WE GOING TO HAVE ANY LUNCH TODAY?"

This is a sign that the gardening season is in full swing and I realise now, as I think about writing to you, that in the garden I stop using proper time – you know, the sort that you get on your watch. I switch into a special mode called gardener's time. It works like this. Get off to a late and slow start in a morning, still stiff from yesterday, and after breakfast do a survey of which of the many jobs is most pressing. A few little jobs get done now, then it is time for morning coffee. After that, a bigger job gets done and only when this is completed do I think about getting lunch. You can see that there is room for slippage here, compared to other people's timetable and Andrew's nutrient requirements. (If you are worried about him, he does look really well).

Well, what have I been doing? It is a big job that started last November and will be finished by the time you read this, but only just. I have done a major re-organisation of all the beds. First, the Autumn-fruiting raspberry bed has gone. The canes have never done well where they were and have frequently been renewed so now they are in two different areas, amongst flowers. Raspberries are in the *Rosaceae* (Rose) family so new ones should not be planted in the place of old but I was trying my luck. A fig tree, which had been in position, elsewhere, for six years, has been moved (this took us two days) into the raspberry bed. It had originally been planted in a root restraining bag, as should happen with figs, so that fruit growth is promoted over root growth. This meant that we could lift it with fairly intact roots apart from some that had escaped over the top of the bag. I have replanted it, without the bag, now that I realise that my shallow soil will be restraint enough.

Alongside the fig tree there is a new blackcurrant bush, variety 'Big Ben'. This replaces a Ben Sarak blackcurrant bush that was elsewhere. We had disposed of it as it got an infestation of Big Bud mite for which there is no treatment available to home gardeners. As the name implies, large rounded (healthy-looking!) buds appear in the winter but these do not develop so the crop and vigour of the bush is reduced. Between the fig and blackcurrant there is a new variety of buddleja which doesn't grow too big and when in flower the butterflies will love it. All three are under planted with perennials, to give ground cover. I have never worried about mixing fruit, veg and flowers, in fact, the runner beans, the white flowered 'White Lady', are going to be in my newly enlarged flower area.

In another, predominantly flower area, most plants were removed and potted up so that I could add another ton of top soil. I managed to spread that in two goes and then, redesigning started. The top storey, the tallest plants, haven't moved. They are the two trees Albizia 'julibrissin' and Gleditsia 'Sunburst' and the shrub, Sophora 'Sun King'. They are now joined by two new Clematis, evergreen 'Armandii' and Montana 'Mayleen' to cover the fence. Some grasses have moved in to join Melianthus Major and Rudbeckia 'Herbstsonne' in the middle storey and the bottom storey is planted with perennials and grasses so that I get rhythm throughout the garden. This means that many plants from elsewhere in the garden have been for a ride in a wheel barrow. The last two beds are just being finished now.

All through this replanting a new thought has been flashing in my head. **GROUND COVER. The ground cover is not to stop weeds, which it will, but to protect the soil surface from the intense heat we sometimes get now.** Underneath spreading plants the surface of the soil remains damp for longer, they add to the effect of any mulch you have added. I have often wondered if this shielding effect outweighs the extra water uptake by the plant itself. **I think it does.** Plants that I already have, but have divided, so that I have more of them for this job, are Geranium 'Rozanne', Campanula persicifolia and Origanum vulgare 'Aureum' amongst others.

Food for thought!

Dividing lots of plants and buying new ones means that I have enough spare plants for a plant stall. I look forward to a garden club 'Rendezvous' at my two day plant sale on Saturday 8th May and Sunday 9 May.

Updated 8 May. ALL SOLD OUT, SUNDAY SALE CANCELLED!

Happy gardening to all,
Dorothy