



Wildlife Gardening by Janet Norman

When we moved to our house 15 years ago, I hoped we would see more birds as we backed onto a sloping field with a brook at the bottom and fields and woods beyond. Well we saw herons floating down to the stream for lunch, buzzards wheeling overhead, jays, woodpeckers and even a kingfisher flew through the garden one day. Of course we also had to put up with flocks of starlings, magpies and wood pigeons that followed the animals in the field. This year a nuthatch took over the blue tit nest box and after three weeks hammering inside and out, customised it to their requirements. After the fledglings left I was interested in how the nest was constructed, it took time to open the box as they had plastered the inside with mud. The contents were simply the peelings of bark from my Acer Griseum which was looking as bare and smooth as a baby's bottom.

When the swallows arrive in April they fly round the vegetable patch and perch on the fruit cage and raised beds and peck at the bare dry soil. This is repeated throughout the summer but they don't nest near here as far as I know. They may think the black plastic is water or they may be pecking at insects, however in September they gather on the roof and TV aerial. There could be over 50 - 70 at a time and we're always sad to see them depart as it's the first sign of autumn.

Pretty soon it was evident we had some four legged visitors as small tunnels appeared in the compost and around the garden. My newly planted peas never appeared and when they moved into the garage we had to take action as they were removing the labels from the herbicides and pesticides for nesting material. One morning we discovered a dead chicken, it's head buried in a raised bed and its body hanging over the side, our visitors were increasing in size, as were the holes. Some of the holes contained a white material which I couldn't identify. At first I thought it was a type of fungus but it didn't smell. A neighbour then confessed she was in the habit of feeding foxes and badgers pork pies and sausage rolls at night.

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“FOR, LO, THE WINTER IS PAST, THE RAIN IS OVER AND GONE; THE FLOWERS APPEAR ON THE EARTH; THE TIME OF THE SINGING OF THE BIRDS IS COME.”

Song of Solomon

Derbyshire Delights: Middleton-by-Youlgreave by Patricia Harrison



Middleton-by-Youlgreave is my featured delight. The village itself is not large, but picturesque in a typical Peak District way. It has a long history with records dating back to the Middle Ages. Middleton Castle was built in the early seventeenth century, a royalist stronghold; the owner was killed by Roundheads in November 1645. The castle is no longer standing as the village was rebuilt by Thomas Bateman in the 1820's featuring some of the original building styles of the early village.

I'd like to tell you about not one but 17 delights that are to be found here, all of which mark the 17 entrances to the village. They are collectively known as "Sites of Meaning"- a millennium project. It was actually started in 1999 and finished in 2006, with the help of a Sculpture Residency in 2002, Amanda Wray - who carved the eighth delight in the school playground.

There are stone sculptures and boundary stones, all inscribed with a text either chosen or compiled by members of the parish of Middleton and Smerrill and with the input of the surrounding communities as the project grew. These inscriptions are to be found on curb stones, bridges and in stone walls; you have to search for some of them as the vegetation is winning, all part of the fun!

The Sites of Meaning Project was organised by a team of parishioners, who raised funds, collected texts for the inscriptions, commissioned artists and stone masons. Over 200 people were involved, young and old alike. The culmination of the project was the 18 delight, a stone table in the village square (actually a triangle) on which all the sites are engraved in the form of a compass.

The community (137 residents at the last census) continues to keep the spirit of village life going with an annual well dressing in the month of July (the first one in living memory was in 1977 to honour the Queen's Silver Jubilee). During the event, plant sales are available. Additionally, the latest fund raiser is to pay for the re-roofing of the beautiful church of St Michael and all Angels. The café Molly Moos serves delicious refreshments and there is also a gift shop located in the centre of the village. If walking in the area, do take the time to visit.

The Ten Laws of Gardening

1

Nothing ever looks like it does on the seed packet.

2

Your lawn is always slightly bigger than your desire to mow it.

3

Whichever garden tool you want it is always at the back of the shed.

4

The only way to ensure rain is to give the garden a good soaking.

5

Weeds grow at precisely twice the rate you can pull them out.

6

Autumn follows summer, winter follows autumn, frost follows planting.

7

The only way to guarantee some colour all year round is to buy a gnome.

8

However bare the lawn, grass will appear in the cracks between paving stones.

9

'Annuals' means disappointment once a year.

10

Nothing is more exasperating than a hose that just isn't long enough.

"WHAT A MAN NEEDS IN GARDENING IS A CAST-IRON BACK WITH A HINGE IN IT."

Charles Dudley Warner

Plant of Interest: Aroids by Ian Evans

Aroids are a very large family of flowering plants; there are 114 genera and 3750 known species. They are all monocotyledons and the flowers are borne on an inflorescence called a spadix which is usually encased in a leaf-like bract called a spathe. The variety is amazing, with the Araceae family including the world's largest inflorescence in the Titan arum (*Amorphophallus titanum*) and the world's smallest flowering plant, duckweed (*Wolffia*)!

Among the best known members of the family are *Anthurium*, *Colocasia* (including taro), *Philodendron* and *Monstera* (including the swiss cheese plant). These, and most of the other genera grow in tropical or sub-tropical climates, but there are many which will grow well in British gardens. Most of these are uncommon however, largely because they lack the colourful flowers or attractive foliage that leads most gardeners to acquire plants for their gardens. This is unfortunate because some of these hardy aroids are very interesting and well worth growing.

Perhaps the best known hardy aroid is *Arum maculatum*, the well-known "lords and ladies", which is a common British woodland native. A more ornate member of this genus is *Arum italicum*, particularly the subspecies *italicum* 'Marmoratum', which has lovely marbled silver leaf markings showing up at their best during the autumn months. The white hooded flower spathes are followed by distinctive spikes of orange-red berries in late summer.

They are easy to grow, require little attention and can be propagated by splitting the clumps every few years. More statuesque, but recognisably from the same family, are the *Arisaemas* (or, as I like to imagine them, slugs' ear trumpets!). These are taller than the *Arums*, but include some quite beautiful species. *Arisaema candidissimum* has beautiful striped spathes and is a choice plant for growing in dappled shade.

Arisaema griffithii is known as the Cobra lily and has striped maroon and green spathes, quite ominous in

appearance, although *Arisaema tortuosum* is even more snakelike with its long upward-reaching spadix tip resembling a searching tongue. *Arisaemas* are not difficult to grow where the soil is deep humus and the drainage is good. I have had most success with *tortuosum*.

A most sinister species is *Dracunculus vulgaris*, which can grow to over five feet tall. The impressive dark red spathe throws out a deep purple spadix which smells strongly of rotten meat. This a reminder that most of the Aroids are pollinated by flies, which are attracted by the smell. Lovely to look at from a distance but not a plant for near the back door!

Lysichiton americanus is an impressive plant for growing along woodland streams and bog gardens. Known as the "skunk cabbage" it produces bright yellow spathes up to two feet tall which precede the rather coarse foliage. There is also a white version, originating in Asia, *Lysichiton camtschatcensis*, which has been given an AGM by the RHS, despite it being declared an invasive alien species by the EU!

A more delicate and secretive plant is *Arisarum proboscideum*, the 'mouse plant', whose dainty flowers look a bit like miniature *Arisaemas*, but which are completely hidden by the relatively large pointed leaves. They are easy to grow in any good soil in semi-shade and will spread to occupy up to a square metre in time. They are always a good talking point!

Podophyllum peltatum is a larger plant than *Arisarum*, but has the same habit of hiding its flowers beneath the leaves. It is equally easy to grow and is a little more invasive but is easy to dig out when it infringes its allotted site.

The white flowers are a delightful discovery when the leaves are lifted up at the right time in early May.

Another *Podophyllum* is the very popular 'Spotty Dotty', which is being offered by a number of nurseries now. I have found this more difficult to grow, but others have had success with it. It seems to prefer a more shady spot than other *Podophylla*.

Finally I must include *Zantedeschia aethiopica*, which is less hardy than the other aroids mentioned above. The more common white form can be grown outdoors in Derby and will survive all but the coldest winters. The foliage will be destroyed by the cold but will grow back as good as new in the spring. They benefit from a thick mulch to protect the rhizomes. We have had great success with plants grown in large containers which we move into the greenhouse for the winter, we treat the green-flowered form 'Green Goddess' in the same way; Beth Chatto manages to grow the latter outdoors as a marginal plant but we find that in Derby it does need to be containerised. None of the various coloured forms recently proliferating in flower shows (known as Calla lilies) are hardy enough to grow outdoors.

The aroids are an interesting family of plants with many being hardy enough to grow in British gardens. They deserve to be more widely grown.



Dates for your Diary

Date	Event	Location
22 April	The Wild Orchids of the Peak District by Byron Machin	Shirland Village Hall 2pm
20 May	Plant fair	Shirland Village Hall 11am
28 May	Doddington Hall, Potterton's Nursery and plant Fair	Pick up: Travelodge, Alfreton 9am
16 - 19 June	Holiday to South Wales	Pick up: Travelodge, Alfreton 7.30am
25 June	Hemingford Abbot's Biennial Festival and Open Gardens	Pick up: Travelodge, Alfreton 9.30am
7 August	Savill Gardens, Windsor Great Park	Pick up: Travelodge, Alfreton 7.45am
16 Sept	Plants for the Shady Garden by Robert Barlow	Shirland Village Hall 2pm

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She said it was more entertaining than watching TV. I realised the white material was the pastry left after the fox had eaten the meat.

Then the main opponent arrived, as that is how I think of Bill Badger. He digs really big holes and tears things down, it's like having a miniature, out of control JCB in your garden. I've lost count of the products I have used to discourage Mr.B. I started with chilli powder, curry powder, pepper, unwanted perfume and aftershave, all washed away with rain, CDs on sticks, plastic bottles on sticks, a radio under a bucket tuned to the World Service, (they don't like the human voice apparently) and my latest trials with solar powered animal deterrent. They appear to work for cats but not for BBs. My husband also donated some urine, all to no avail.

I can see where and when he's been as he leaves muddy paw prints on the black plastic paths. He visits my neighbours wildlife pond first which he keeps empty of frogs and newts and then moves on to me for some serious digging. I saw it one night, I opened the bedroom window and shouted "YOU BEAST" and it scuttled away at great speed. I wondered afterwards if my neighbours thought it was a domestic incident.

My latest discovery was a newly planted nerine bulb that was tossed aside so I went for my trowel to replant it and dug up a whole 1lb pork pie. I showed this to the non gardener whose reply as usual was "that's what you get from living next to a field". The pie was tossed into the field and the bulb replanted. The following night Fantastic Mr. Fox returned for his pie and dug up the nerine again. My main observation through all of this is that if you want to feed wild animals in your garden, spare a thought for your neighbours, as they are going to have to live with them as well. If anybody knows of effective and legal way of keeping BBs out of the garden, please let me know.

Ed: A few years ago, several of our hellebores opened with lots of symmetrical holes in them, literally like a cake doyle! I assumed an insect had been eating them until one morning, I glanced out of the window and saw three hen pheasants pecking away at the buds! What wildlife do you share your garden with? Let us know!

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If you have an article that you would like to see published in the newsletter, please send as a Word document to: alisonfarnsworth@btinternet.com or by post to:

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Please send photos (as separate attachments) too if you have them.

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Reminder: If you would like to receive your copy of the HPS Derbyshire newsletter by email, please let me have your name, address and e-mail address so that I can add you to the list.

Thanks once again to Emma Oaks for designing the newsletter.