

April 2018

Now this is the month that it really starts to step up a gear plant wise, although just at the moment the plants seem to be treading water I have just been over to the walled garden here at Howbury and checked the rain gauge which wait for it had 34 mm in it and that is since good Friday unbelievable. March last year had a total of 36mm, up until last Thursday we had had 37mm making a grand total of 73mm in old money that's 2" & 7/8ths. It has stopped us working the soil. This time last year the potatoes were in and ridged the carrots, beetroot, parsnips and peas were sown and some were through. As always in this country every year is different which makes it interesting and infuriating at the same time, cannot change it just go with it.



Here at Howbury we have greenhouses and coldframes which are almost full, if you are following my monthly contributions and are lucky enough to have this form of plant protection the seeds I suggested to sow should be coming through by now, the peas and broad beans should have been sown into module trays so leave them until the ground dries out as they could rot off the modules could be put outside in a sheltered spot try to stand them off the ground and watch out for pigeons and mice. When it comes to plant these and other plantlets just cover with horticultural fleece until they get established. The tomatoes, peppers and aubergines if you have sown them should be pricked out into 3" pots of good compost and watered when needed in the morning this allows time to dry and warm up before night fall as a cold damp compost will rot them off, open greenhouses during the day to lower the temperature don't forget to shut it by late afternoon if possible.



The following information is for when the soil dries up and ground warms a little. **Hardy and half-hardy Annuals:** - calendula, cornflower, nigella, annual chrysanthemums [*not to be confused with the ones you buy at the supermarket or garage forecourt*] these are bright daisy style flowers that if dead headed on a regular basis will flower throughout the summer and into autumn. Look out for seed at the garden centre better still from seed catalogues look for hardy annuals on the packet, these can be sown in among your existing plants and will fill in gaps brilliantly giving a riot of colour with the bonus of some cut flowers for the house. Others to look out for are: - Ammi Major – like cow parsley but more attractive and longer lasting if cut for the vase. Bidens -multi headed yellow daisy flowers. Clarkia – 18” tall spikes of varying shades of pink and mauve. Cosmos- tall plants in shades from white to deep pink and every shade in between, Eschscholtzea [*Californian poppy*] these need a warm sunny spot and will keep producing vivid yellow and orange flowers all summer. Gaillardia - again daisy type flowers in shades of yellow red and orange. Godetia - pink flowers in clusters keep dead heading to keep flowering. Larkspur- known as annual delphiniums sow these at monthly intervals for flowers to cut right in to the autumn, a late sowing will over winter to give you colour in late spring. Lavatera- a member of the mallow family giving a great display of open trumpets of white or pink. Nasturtiums- some types are climber others clump forming shades of yellow, red, orange, pink and cream and variants of these colours, these plants have an added bonus in that they are edible the leaves and flowers can be added to salads adding a peppery note plus the seeds can be pickled and used instead of capers, just watch out for caterpillars on these plants. Poppies- there are several types that can be scattered in and around the garden in shades of pink, purple, white and red. Sunflowers – if you feed the wild birds you will have probably had a sunflower germinate and pop up in your garden there are a wide choice to grow not all want to reach 20 feet tall, there are dwarf types about to feet tall to mid-range ones 4-5feet tall if you cut the flowers for the vase this encourages side shoots and more flowers. There are lots more types out their experiment with shape and colour you will be amazed, don't worry about colour clashing that is rubbish in nature, its you garden sow what you want and ignore the rest.



In the flower bed if you have perennials they are showing new growth a low nitrogen fertilizer at a light dose will give them a gentle boost, look out for pest's slugs they will devour a delphinium shoot overnight. Slug pellets are an option but if you have pets try this idea, get a used small margarine or butter spread container wash it out dry it o take the bottom part and cut a section out of each end on the rim about one and a half cm square does not matter if you cut through the rim. Now get your slug pellets and put about a tea spoon full into the pot put the lid back on carefully turn upside down keeping level place into your flower bed and carefully place on the ground taking care not to spill the pellets, place a small stone on top to stop it blowing away. This will attract the slugs which will go inside to feast and die in there so no bird or hedgehog will eat them. keep checking this trap empty the dead ones into the bin and replenish with fresh pellets, you can place several around the garden next to vulnerable plants and you use less pellets.

In the fruit garden especially the bush fruit keep an eye out for finches they have tenancy to eat the new green buds thus reducing you crop, to help stop this get an old CD disc drill a hole near the edge thread some string through it and hang from a another piece of string tied between two sticks ore canes above you fruit bushes, as it spins the light will scare them away. If you have an apple tree in your garden and every autumn when you come to harvest them you find that some little critter has eaten there way out of you apple rendering it wasted, this critter is called a Codling Moth which lays its eggs on the tiny new formed apples in spring eats its way inside feasts all summer to emerge in late summer as an adult.to stop or at least reduce this you don't need sprays, there is such a thing as a codling pheromone trap, available in garden centres and on line. This works by mimicking the smell given off by the female called a pheromone all the randy male codling moths think wow and fly towards the tap to then be caught on the very sticky card inside the trap. In heavy infestation areas the sticky base card will have to be replaced.

Roses if you are a fan of roses as I am then keep an eye on them from now onwards when the first true leaves have unfolded get a good fungal spray for roses now this will go against the instructions on the packet so its at your own risk but this is what we did at Abbey House Gardens in Wiltshire which I co-created we doubled the recommended dose, [these chemicals are watered down for

domestic use as they go on the idea that we are all idiots reducing use all to the lowest common denominator i.e. the half whit. To this diluted double strength mix add the recommended dose of maxicrop seaweed extract widely available to it the spray your roses and I mean spray your roses that's the top and bottom of the leaf the stems and around the base basically every where fungus spores can hang out, it helps if you mulch heavily around your roses as the bacteria in the soil break down the fungal spores. Repeat this procedure every fortnight weather permitting three times this should keep your roses disease free and if rust or black spot come back or the first signs of it spray the affected bush with the same repeat procedure. Through out the season spray fortnightly with the seaweed extract every plant would benefit from this its like us taking vitamin pills. Down here at Howbury Hall Gardens things are coming on at apace despite the weather. we have started replanting the orchard 17 new fruit trees have been planted i.e. Apples- 8 varieties, Pear- three varieties two of which are Perry Pears, Sweet Almond, Medlar, Gages and Plums. Still twenty or so places to fill but we will get there. The 8 varieties of hazel and cobnuts have been planted into large pots for now until their planting site is cleared. In the walled garden the Pear Tunnel has been completed and planted, a collection of gooseberries has been planted to be fan trained as time goes on. In the woodland garden a Cedar of Lebanon [Cedrus Lebani] has been planted next to the stump of the copper beech that came down this winter it will I hope grow and replace the very old cedar of Lebanon nearby.

Martin Roberts M.C.I.Hort. Head Gardener Howbury Hall Estate Renhold