



Gardeners' Question Time 14 January 2021 Selected Answers to Questions from Members

We were treated to an excellent evening of gardening advice from Philip Whaites and Richard Gant (below), with Liz Whittle managing to squeeze in good number of members' questions. As promised, here are several of the responses from our panellists which included suggested species and other names which were hard to catch at the time.



- Question In the Ramsey Walled Garden we have had a problem with whitefly in the greenhouse, particularly on salvias. What has the panel found to be the best way to help deal with the problem?
- Richard *Fatty Acids Spray, Garlic Smokes & Encarsia formosa (biological control) all available from <https://www.greengardener.co.uk/shop/insect-wildlife-houses-and-food.html>*
- Philip *Whitefly is very difficult to control in the winter especially with the Encarsia wasp. My method was to use a leaf blower (open all windows) on a low setting and gently spray a mix of horticultural soap and water to break down the surface tension on the wings. This reduces the population but is not the complete solution.*
- Question Leek crops are now being assaulted by allium leaf miner. Has the panel had this problem and does the suggested remedy of covering crops with fleece or enviro-mesh work?
- Richard *I don't have personal experience. There is no spray control available on the domestic market and a clear, very fine mesh is what the experts recommend particularly when the adults are laying their eggs March-April and September-October. Crop rotation is important.*

- Question My house is alongside the Forty Foot Drain with a steep slope (a rare problem in the fens). The steep slope is about 3 m wide. It faces due north and is very heavy clay, dug out when creating the drain. Do you have any planting suggestions? Originally, we planted *Symphytum* which has taken over parts of this slope.?
- Richard *Liriope muscari*; *Luzula sylvatica* 'Variegata'; *Brunnera macrophylla*; *Vinca major* and *V. minor* including variegated; *Geranium phaeum*; *Hellebores*; *Acorus gramineus* 'Variegatus'; *Acorus gramineus* 'Ogen'; *Asplenium scolopendrium* and *A. crispum* (harts tongue fern); *Dryopteris filix-mas* (male fern); *Ruscus aculeatus* (butcher's broom); snowdrops; aconites; *Sarcococca*. Might also use *Salix 'Britzensis'* for its golden winter stems, coppiced hard back in spring. Predominantly native or native-like plants appropriate for a natural site.
- Question What tree would you recommend for my garden? The garden is only about 5 m x 10 m and already has a *Prunus autumnalis*, so the question may be a little challenging! I would also rule out sorbus/ amelanchier/ crab apple as I would like something different!
- Richard Try upright shrubs, *Azara microphylla*; *Abelia triflora*, or *Aralia elata*; *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata'; *Cornus alternifolia* 'Argentea'; *Euonymus europaeus* 'Red Cascade' (spindle), *Ginkgo biloba*.
- Philip To add to Richard's replies, one Shrub which would train up well as a small tree is *Arbutus unedo* (the strawberry tree); it is evergreen and has a lot of interest with its flower and fruits and as it ages the bark looks great. Another shrub/ tree is the Harlequin Glorybower, *Clerodendrum trichotomum*. If this is allowed to grow on for a few years once established it can be pruned back to a single stem and produces new growth which flowers on new wood. This is then pruned every year or every other year depending on space.
- Question I have a very small bed, about 1' x 4', with *Iris Jane Phillips* which flowers beautifully every year but then nothing to follow. Any ideas of what I could put in? I know *Iris* roots need the sun and, so far, I have just left the ground bare. I did wonder about little bulbs for the spring but any suggestions would be really welcome.
- Richard *Verbena bonariensis* and *Stipa tenuissima*.
- Question Honey fungus has decimated the trees in the part of my garden that formed part of an old orchard. Which fruit tree (or indeed, any tree) would be most resilient as a replacement?
- Richard Honey fungus likes members of the *Rosaceae* family so try and stay clear of *Prunus*, *Malus*, etc. The RHS website has a good guide to plants susceptible to and those more tolerant of honey fungus. Scroll down on the attached link <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/garden-health/disease/Honey-fungus>. Keeping on the fruit theme, I would suggest *Corylus maxima* (cobnut), *Corylus avellana* (hazelnut), *Morus nigra* (black mulberry) or *Pyrus* (pear).
- Question I have a 2-year-old abutilon which has not flowered during 2020. Could you tell me about the care and conditions needed for their growth and how hardy they are?
- Richard Abutilons require a south facing sheltered site with good drainage or a temperate glasshouse. With warmer winters, they should be more able to survive but they are on the semi-hardy/ hardy cusp and thrive more in the southwest gardens of Devon and Cornwall. The Abutilon 'Patrick Syngé' in the south corner of the Madingley walled garden next to warm heated bedrooms is 40 years old and never fails to perform without any protection. Protection would be a fleece wrapped around in early winter and a mulch to protect the roots.
- Question How do you control Cabbage White butterflies on brassicas in an organic veg plot? Last summer despite using the recommended-gauge netting over my brassicas the

Cabbage Whites reduced them to lace. I found a recipe for homemade garlic spray but did not go ahead and make it as I had left it too late. I did not use a commercial organic spray. What would the Panellists recommend I could do this year please to ensure I get to eat some of my brassicas?

Richard Try mint in a pot in the immediate locality, or *Artemisia absinthium* or *Salvia officinalis*. A tea made from soaking *Thymus vulgaris* leaves and sprayed onto the cabbage. Have a look at <https://www.greengardener.co.uk/catalogsearch/result/?q=cabbage+white+fly>. Historically, I have known gardeners use nicotine spray or the drainings from soaked rhubarb leaves (then diluted with water) but I am not advocating this especially as both are very toxic, even if organic.

Philip I used Enviromesh on most brassicas; it is long lasting and does not break down in sunlight. The other product I used on the whole plant was Orosorb; it is great for making it difficult for pests to stick to the leaves of many plants, including the eggs of cabbage white butterflies, but does need spraying all over the plants. It contains the crushed waste peel from Oranges. It can be obtained from Treedale Farm Produce Ltd. John Rowntree, who runs the company, has years of experience in growing brassicas and supplying seed.

Question I haven't been to Wimpole for a few years so there might be changes there which would make my question irrelevant. I would like to know if there are any extant plans for the lake as designed by Brown or early drawings of the area? I have always felt that the upper lake doesn't sit very comfortably in the landscape. If I remember correctly there is a dip in the land before you reach the water so the water appears to be high in your eye line as you walk towards it. I have always felt that Brown made the most natural looking lakes which are far from a natural feature in southern England, so it is a surprise that he didn't try to disguise this with some lakeside planting.

Philip When Brown was commissioned, the lakes comprised three fishponds. It was a difficult site with changes in levels. Brown made best use of the site and created three lakes with a Chinese bridge on the middle dam. He also planted trees and shrubs presumably to diffuse the change of levels from the middle lake to the lower expanse of water. One of Brown's statement Plane trees still exists today. When the restoration took place in 1995 it involved re-building the lower dam and dredging the middle and lower lake. It was decided not to re-instate the upper lake (cost issues as far as I am aware). This would have acted as a sediment trap for the middle lake, so future dredging may have to take place. A site overview of the completed lakes was commissioned by the Trust and my son, Christopher, submitted the image (I hope to have this copied!). The lake can be viewed only in the attic rooms of the mansion. Later, Repton suggested a mast and sail on the lower lake to give the impression of water from the mansion. Regarding tree planting, an initial survey of the site by John Phibbs identified many tree positions and types of tree. This listing has been added to over the years with more research including a views survey. Many trees have reached maturity and the re-planting programme is an ongoing process, as we did not want trees maturing at the same time, to avoid creating a uniform appearance.

Question I am interested in Companion Planting and would like to ask the Panellists what they have tried and would recommend please.

Richard Single flowered *Tagetes patula* (French marigold) with carrots; onion sown next to carrots; lavender with carrots and leeks.